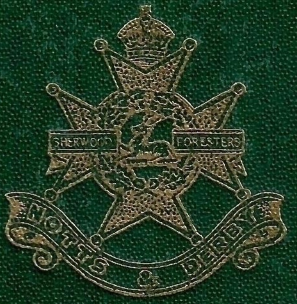
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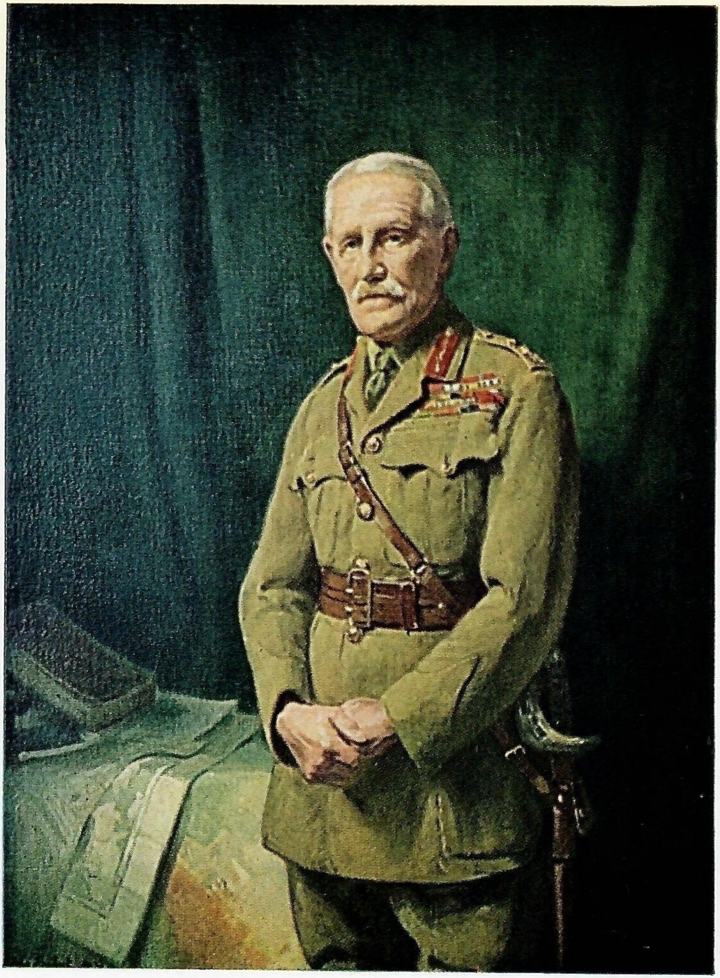
THE SHERWOOD FORESTERS
(NOTTINGHAMSHIRE AND DERBYSHIRE REGIMENT)
1919—1957



The late General Sir Horace Lockwood Smith-Dorrien, G.C.B., G.C.M.G., D.S.O.

Colonel The Sherwood Foresters 1905–1930

THE HISTORY OF THE SHERWOOD FORESTERS

(Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire Regiment)

1919—1957

By

BRIGADIER C. N. BARCLAY, C.B.E., D.S.O.

Produced under the direction of
The Regimental Affairs Committee
The Sherwood Foresters

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to all who served with The Sherwood Foresters (Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire Regiment) in the Second World War of 1939–1945, and to the memory of those who lost their lives.

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FOREWORD

By Major-General P. N. White, C.B., C.B.E.

Colonel: The Sherwood Foresters

The history of the Regiment from its beginning in 1741 to 1919 and the end of World War I was written by Colonel Harold Wylly and published in 1929.

This present book carries the proud story on to 1957. Its author, Brigadier C. N. Barclay, a soldier historian was asked to condense the events of these thirty-eight years into a short book that could be produced at a reasonably low cost, an extremely difficult and exacting task and one the author has accomplished with great skill.

The greater part of the history deals rather naturally with events in World War II. The Regiment had what I think might be described as an unlucky war.

The 1st, 5th and 8th Battalions after gallant fights all went into captivity and disappear temporarily from the scene though not from our minds. Their fortitude in adversity forms one of the finest chapters in our long history.

The 6th Battalion and The Robin Hoods inevitably spent the greater part of their time helping in the vital task of protecting the Home Base; but both fought in the campaign in NW. Europe 1944 and earned great distinction.

The 9th Battalion, of gallant World War I memory, took part in the retreat to Dunkirk but was then converted to R.A.C. and unfortunately, leave the Regimental scene early on.

The 12th and 13th Battalions were also re-raised and got as far as India, but there, both were very wrongly retained in a 'Jungle' training rôle and were denied active participation in battle though their names stood high.

The greater part of the actual fighting fell to the 2nd, 2/5 and 14th Battalions, and their record in all the many operations in Europe and North Africa is a matter of great pride to us.

In commending this book to all Foresters and the many friends of the Regiment, I offer my thanks to the Author, to Richard Garrett for his earlier valuable contributions which covered much of the ground work of the present book, to Colonel Stewart Carter, Lieut-Colonel 'Gunga' Dean and Major Vernon Sudbury for their important work behind the scenes.

P N White
Major General
Colonel The Sherwood
Foresters.

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

A Regimental history can be written in great detail, recording every move of every unit and sub-unit, and many names and statistics: or it can be a modest book giving only the 'meat' of events, with a few good illustrations and simple maps. The Sherwood Foresters numbered twenty Battalions in World War II and if the former type of history had been undertaken it would have run to several volumes, it would have taken many years to compile and its cost would have been prohibitive. It was, therefore, decided to write a less ambitious book—mainly for serving and ex-members of the Regiment, their relatives and friends—which could be produced fairly quickly, and sold at a price within the reach of most pockets.

I have done my best to write a book of this kind. Nevertheless, I realize that much gallantry and fine service, worthy of detailed record, has been either totally omitted or given less space than it deserves. In order to keep the book within the limits set, I have curtailed the description of peace-time activities, and non-active periods in war, and given emphasis to the fighting.

A few remarks about the manner in which the book has been written will not be out of place. I have followed the practice of the official historians at the Historical Section of the Cabinet Office, and not generally given the decorations of personnel mentioned. An exception is when mentioning very distinguished officers for the first time. When referring to other Regiments and units I have not always given their full titles, or even their official abbreviated ones. Those used, however, make identification perfectly clear and are, I believe, acceptable to the Regiments concerned.

It will be noticed that I have not designated the 7th Battalion by its number; but called it 'The Robin Hoods'—the name by which it is familiarly known locally and in the Regiment.

The question of background is always a difficult one in a book of this sort. It is wrong to suppose that readers of the future, or even today, will be familiar with the events which led up to the campaigns, battles and other incidents in which the Foresters were involved. I have tried to place myself in the position of a reader of twenty-five years hence, who has no more than an average knowledge of military history, and to provide sufficient background to enable one in his position to understand the story without reference to other books.

In the course of compiling this history I obtained help from many people, too numerous to mention. I must confine my thanks to the following, whose assistance was of special value:

Major-General P. N. White, C.B., C.B.E., the Colonel of the Regiment at the time, who laid down the policy at the outset, and guided me on policy matters as I went along.

Colonel S. L. A. Carter, M.B.E., M.C., who I think first suggested that I should write this book, and who gave me much help and advice.

Major V. C. W. Sudbury, M.C., the Regimental Depot Commander during most of the period of my work. His prompt attention to the many questions with which I bombarded him, and hospitality whenever I visited Normanton Barracks, were major contributions in enabling the script to be completed in less than twelve months.

Lieut-Colonels H. D. Pyman, and G. S. Aspdin, T.D., who checked respectively Chapters 6 (Tobruk) and 7 (Singapore), and made very helpful suggestions for improving the text.

Lieut-Colonel A. A. Dean, the Secretary of the Regimental Association, who gave me invaluable assistance by checking the script and put me right on several occasions when I went wrong.

Major R. V. Hammond, who served with the 2/5th (5th) Battalion during the war.

I must also acknowledge my very great indebtedness to Mr. Richard Garrett, an ex-Officer of the Foresters, who, during the immediate post-war years, compiled a very detailed, but unpublished, record of the Foresters in World War II, and was good enough to give me permission to use it. Mr Garrett's narrative was one of my main sources of information, and represents a major contribution to my own book.

Another very important source of information was, of course, the War Diaries. I wish to thank Mr. H. A. Cordery, the Archivist, Miss A. L. Cooper, the Assistant Archivist, and their staff at the Historical Section of the Cabinet Office in London, for their courtesy during several months of searching through many files. Their help far exceeded the requirements of official duty.

As with previous books, I owe a lot to Miss P. C. McGlinchy, of Camberley, who typed the script so promptly and accurately.

Finally—I wish to record my pride in being given the opportunity to write the history of this famous Regiment, during 38 years of an era of unparalleled strife and adventure.

London,
September 1957

C. N. BARCLAY

CHAPTER 1

BETWEEN THE WARS—I

The Lean Years—1919 to 1930

Author's Note

In these two opening chapters, dealing with the inter-war years from 1919 to 1939, I have not confined the story to the activities of the various Battalions of the Regiment. I have also given in outline the social developments of the times and the political events which led up to the Second World War. In addition I have tried to describe very briefly, and in general terms, life in the Army of those days—at home, in India and in other places where the Foresters served. In some cases I have drawn on my own experience: in others I have consulted people who are better informed than I am.

I feel that this background, although well known to many at the present time, will be less familiar to future generations of readers, who may welcome this introduction to conditions which were in many ways so different from what we have known since 1939.

In the twenty years between the wars a unit of the British Army was liable to serve in almost any part of the world; but, in general terms, the type of service it was most likely to experience can be placed under five headings:

(a) In the United Kingdom.
(b) In occupied Germany—up to June 1930 when the last British troops left.
(c) In the East on garrison duty—India, Burma, Malaya, Iraq, Egypt, etc.
(d) In some war or near-war area—such as Southern Ireland (up to December 1922 when the last British troops left), the North-West Frontier of India, Palestine, the Chanak area (1922), China (Shanghai, 1927), etc.
(e) In some small Colonial station, such as Gibraltar, Malta, Jamaica, etc.

Service under this wide variety of conditions may have had its disadvantages, especially for married men; but there were many compensations. For the officer it gave opportunities for sport and travel which were quite outside the range of his counterparts in the civil professions and in business. For the rank and file it provided adventures which were unknown to the factory or agricultural worker, the railway porter or the clerk.

The cessation of hostilities on the 11th November 1918 confronted the country with conditions which were beyond previous experience. Nearly a million young men had been killed and tens of thousands maimed for life. The balance of the male population of military age was scattered all over the world in Service units. Industry at home was manned mostly by middle-aged men, by the unfit and by women, concentrating their efforts almost entirely on the production of munitions of war and the necessities of life, and earning wages which were three or four times higher than those of pre-war days.

Many of those who are alive today have experienced a transition from war to peace twice, and they appreciate the difficulties of the change over. That was not so in the winter of 1918–19. Then it was almost universally believed that within a few months we could demobilize the forces, re-gear industry to civil needs, regain our old export markets and generally return to a pre-war way of life.

The demobilization of the forces, plans for which had been laid well in advance, worked reasonably smoothly, although many of the returning Servicemen found it difficult to recognize the 'Land fit for heroes to live in'—a phrase which the politicians had coined towards the end of the war. Prices remained high. At the same time the inflated war-time wages declined, there was mass unemployment and we were plagued with a series of industrial disputes which culminated in the General Strike of 1926.

Abroad the scene was equally gloomy. Very soon we had two small wars on our hands, one in Russia (1918–19) and another in Afghanistan (1919). We had the delicate task of holding the ring in a show of force between Greece and Turkey (1922). There was open rebellion in Ireland, and rumblings in India, Palestine (where we were the Mandatory power) and other places. In 1930 the country experienced a financial crisis which, as might be expected, had serious repercussions on the already meagre service estimates.

This was the setting in which the Regular and Territorial armies soldiered, at home and abroad, during the decade and a half from 1918 to 1933.

It soon became apparent after the war that the country was in no mood to shoulder a heavy bill for the armed forces. The military power of all our enemies had been crushed and Russia was still in a chaotic condition following the revolution of 1917. Politicians reiterated the phrase 'No major war for ten years', a slogan which was conveniently re-affirmed year by year long after it had ceased to apply.

The period from the autumn of 1918 to about 1925 was a very difficult one for the army. We rapidly reduced the Regular Army to below the 1914 level: the veterans of the war were demobilized and their places taken by young recruits—excellent material, but untrained. In face of our operational, or near-operational, rôles in Russia, Afghanistan, Ireland, India, Palestine and elsewhere the training which the new army required had to be mingled with fighting and police duty, and in consequence it was some years before we reached the standard of discipline and efficiency which we associate with the British Army in peace.

In pattern the Regular Army was much the same as in 1914, with—as far as the Infantry was concerned—one Battalion at home and one abroad. Units overseas were usually maintained at full strength; but, owing to lack of recruits, units at home were commonly 50 per cent, and sometimes as much as 65 per cent, below establishment. This made any form of practical training above Company level not only difficult, but often farcical. It was not uncommon to see a home-service infantry battalion on an exercise with only its Headquarters and one Company in being, the remaining Companies being represented merely by individuals carrying flags.

The first decade of the inter-war period was very aptly called by the Services 'The Lean Years'.

By June 1919 the cadres of the 1st and 2nd Battalions of the Sherwood Foresters had returned to England to reform on a peace-time basis, and the four Territorial Battalions—5th, 6th, The Robin Hoods and 8th—had also returned to their peace-time homes pending the reforming of the Territorial Force.

The Depot remained in its war-time guise until October 1919, and among its many duties acted as a 'clearing house' for returning Battalions of the Regiment. In the course of this process the cadres of the 1st, 2nd, 9th, 10th, 11th and 16th Battalions passed through the Depot. All were given Civic Receptions by the authorities in Derby, before the men proceeded to Ripon for discharge.

At the head of the Regiment was its Colonel—General Sir Horace L. Smith-Dorrien—the famous Forester who had been the hero of the Battle of Le Cateau in 1914.

THE REGULAR BATTALIONS

1st Battalion

In May 1919 the 1st Battalion, under Lieut-Colonel J. D. Mitchell, left Ath in Belgium and went to the Depot at Derby. There the cadre remained until the end of September when it went, under Major E. N. T. Collin, to Great Crosby, near Liverpool. The 1st Battalion was in the same camp at Moor Lane as the 3rd Battalion, which it absorbed on the 18th October 1919. Thereafter the latter, under the title '3rd Militia Bn. The Sherwood Foresters' remained only a name in the Army List.*

Five weeks later, on the 28th November, the 1st Battalion moved to Blackdown, near Aldershot. On the 15th December Brevet Colonel J. C. Harding-Newman, from the Essex Regiment, assumed command. The stay at Blackdown was a short one. The 22nd January 1920 found the 1st Foresters embarking on the S.S. *Edward Woerman* en route for Schleswig-Holstein. It must be explained that this North German province was inhabited partly by Germans and partly by Danes, and it had been decided to hold a plebiscite to find out whether the people wished to come under German or Danish rule. Allied troops were sent to the area to supervise the voting.

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* The 4th Militia Bn. The Sherwood Foresters was treated in the same way, and became no more than a name in the Army List.

The *Edward Woerman* arrived at Brunsbüttel, at the west entrance of the Kiel Canal, on the 25th January and on the following day the Battalion disembarked at Flensburg, where they were quartered in the German Naval Academy barracks. The Battalion remained at Flensburg until June 1920, although the plebiscite was held in mid-March.*

During the Foresters' stay in Schleswig-Holstein they made great friends with a French unit, the 22nd Chasseurs Alpine, and on the 26th March the Commanding Officer was enrolled as a member of the Regiment and several other officers were made 'Corporals', those so honoured being presented on parade with the French Regimental insignia.

The Battalion left Flensburg for Copenhagen on the 15th June 1920 and on the 17th was inspected in the capital by the King of Denmark. After a very pleasant few days in Denmark they embarked on the 20th for Southampton and then proceeded to Blackdown.

In February 1921 Lieut-Colonel B. G. V. Way took over command from Colonel Harding-Newman.

The spring of 1921 saw the first of the many industrial disputes which were to darken the inter-war years, and as a precautionary measure troops were moved to London. Among them was the 1st Foresters who went into camp in Kensington Gardens on the 6th April. There they were reinforced by some 300 men of the Army Reserve. The trouble did not last long and on the 19th April the Battalion returned to Blackdown.

During the post-war years, strenuous efforts had been made to regain the Battalion's pre-war prowess at sport and good progress was made at cricket, football (rugby and association), boxing, hockey and athletics.

(*Note:* The Regiment's successes at sport and shooting are very numerous and, if given in the body of the text, would seriously disturb the narrative. A full list of sporting and shooting successes, gained by regular units of the Foresters during the period 1919–1939 is given at the end of Chapter 2.)

Except for the so-called Rebellion in 1916 Ireland had been fairly quiet during the war years; but with the coming of peace trouble began again. Arson of loyalists' property, murder of civil police, loyalists and troops, hold-ups and ambushes had become everyday occurrences and a large number of British troops were stationed there in an attempt to preserve order. The underground rebel movement designated itself 'The Irish Republican Army'.

At the end of June 1921 the 1st Foresters left Blackdown for Cork where they landed on the 29th and marched to Ballincollig. A month later they moved to Skibbereen. The period in Ireland was, on the whole, uneventful; but the numerous guard and other duties connected with Internal Security were a serious handicap to

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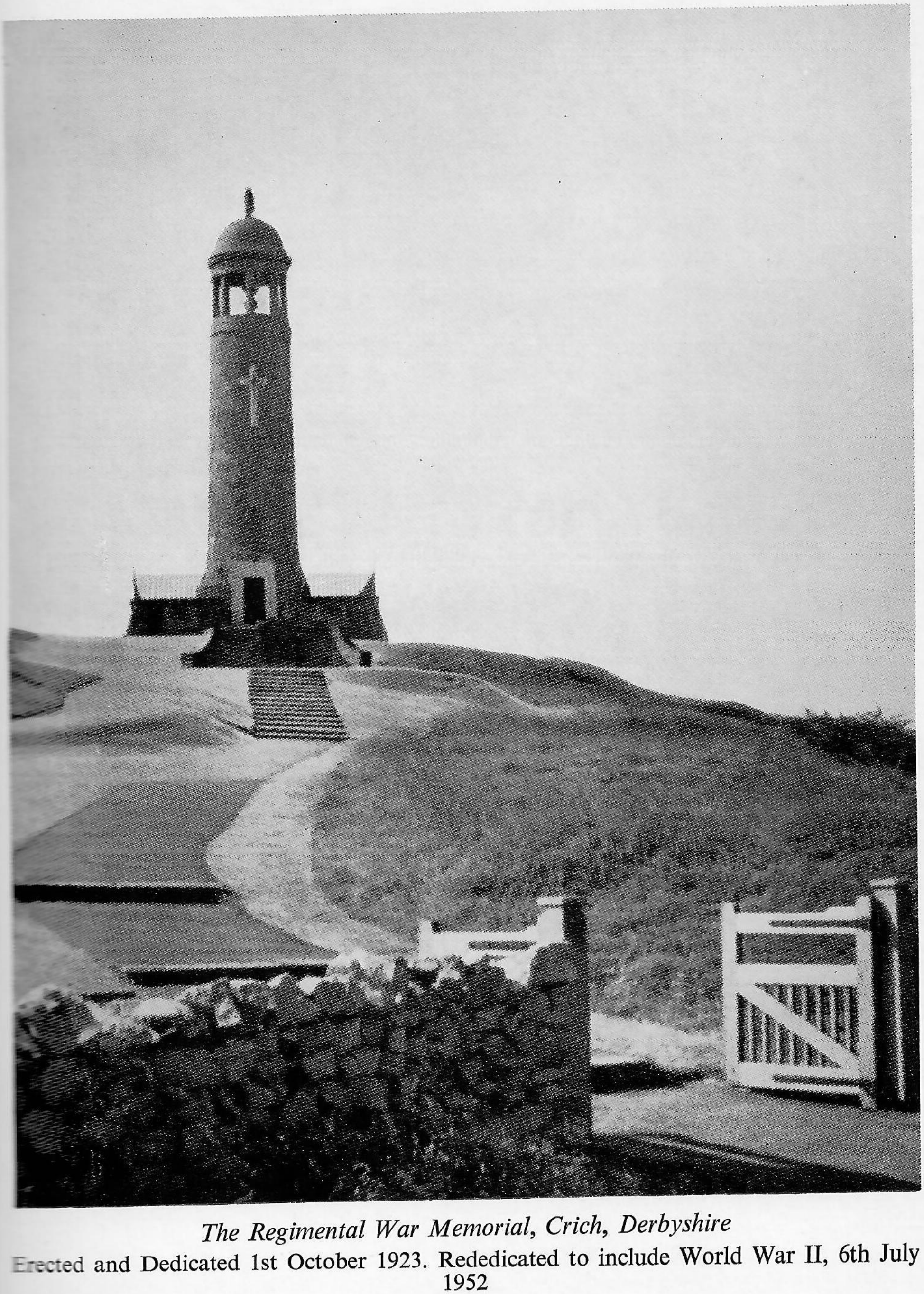
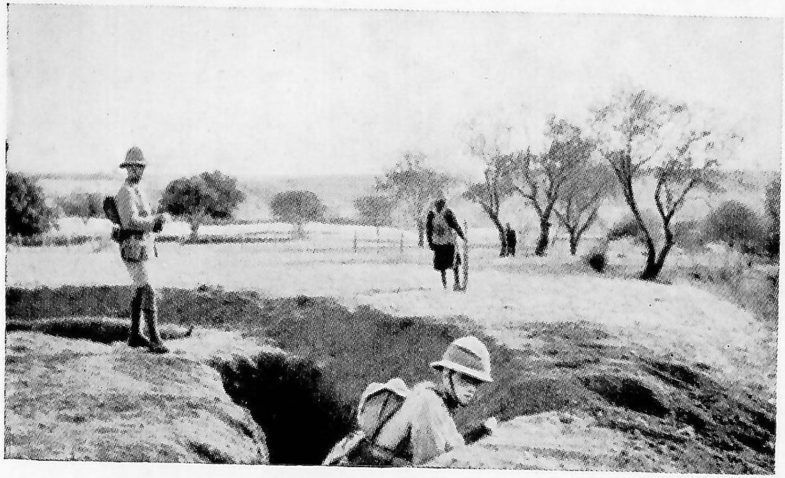
* The result of the voting was—Northern area: 75% Danish, 25% German. Southern area: 75% German, 25% Danish.



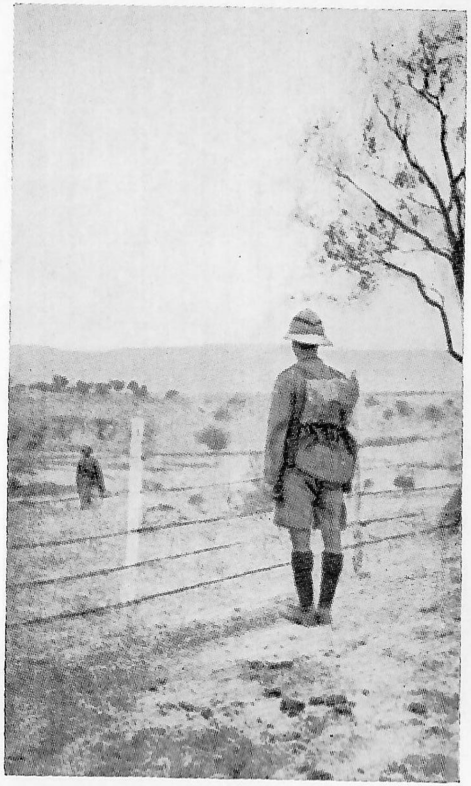
The Regimental War Memorial, Crich, Derbyshire

Erected and Dedicated 1st October 1923. Rededicated to include World War II, 6th July 1952



Chanak, October 1922

A Forester sentry group. Note the Turkish sentry under the tree



Chanak, October 1922

A Forester and a Turkish sentry near Windmill Hill training, and the Battalion was not sorry when at the end of January 1922 it returned to Blackdown.

Six months later, in August 1922, Lieut-Colonel W. N. S. Alexander, from the Connaught Rangers, took command. He was followed by Lieut-Colonel J. H. Wybergh in May 1923.

In those days Aldershot Command—of which Blackdown formed part—was the hub of the British Army. It was the home of the 1st and 2nd Divisions, the spearhead of the B.E.F. in 1914 and again in 1939. It was on the training grounds around Aldershot that much of the experimental work in connection with new equipment and new techniques was carried out. It was held that the ambitious officer usually contrived to spend much of his life in this locality—Wellington, Sandhurst, the Staff College, with periods of regimental and staff duty in some formation in Aldershot Command and ending, so it was sometimes said, as an inmate of Broadmoor Lunatic Asylum!

The 1st Bn. The Sherwood Foresters were to spend the next three years at this best-of-all training centres. In this it was fortunate: nothing of particular note occurred, but the thorough and continuous training, under the best facilities the Army could provide at that time, built up an exceptionally fine battalion at a time when many units, through lack of opportunity, had been unable to reach a similar high standard.

In January 1924 Lieut-Colonel J. H. Wybergh was succeeded in command by Lieut-Colonel K. C. Weldon.

In January 1925 the Battalion moved to Northern Ireland. The country as a whole had changed radically since they had left Cork three years before. Ireland was now partitioned into the Irish Free State, with Dominion status, and Northern Ireland with autonomy in local affairs, but with members still sitting in the Parliament at Westminster. All except three of the famous Irish Infantry Regiments of the Line had been disbanded, and there was no longer a British garrison in Southern Ireland.

On arrival in Northern Ireland the Foresters were located at Ballykinlar. Life was not unpleasant. Facilities for training and sport were good, and the inhabitants very hospitable. In 1926 the Battalion moved to Londonderry, where soon after arrival they were visited by the Colonel of the Regiment, General Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien. That summer the Foresters re-enacted the storming of Badajoz Castle in 1812 at the Northern Ireland District Searchlight Tattoo in Belfast.

It was in 1926 that Private C. Sandall of the 1st Foresters won the North Ireland District Young Soldiers' Cup for shooting, in a field of sixty.

For the officers there was a very pleasant social life in and around Londonderry, the chief forms of recreation being golf, shooting and hunting. The Foresters were mainly instrumental in forming the Londonderry Garrison Drag Hunt. Captain M. H. Cooper was the Master and Lieut. R. T. K. Pye and 2/Lieut. W. M. E. Denison the Whips. Sixteen officers of the Battalion hunted, a very high proportion at a time when it was becoming fashionable to own a car (or motor-bicycle) and take an interest in mechanical devices.

In 1927 the Battalion had more successes at shooting in the Northern Ireland District Meeting, and the Army Rifle Association Meeting at Bisley, and also at football (see list at end of Chapter 2).

The tour of duty in Northern Ireland ended in December 1928, when the 1st Foresters moved to Shorncliffe in Kent. This was another good training centre in pleasant surroundings. The Army at home was, however, at a low ebb. Armed almost entirely with the weapons of the Great War it was also short of recruits. Manœuvres on a big scale were only held every three or four years, ammunition for practice purposes was curtailed and the most rigid economies enforced. The situation was to become even worse in 1930 when the country experienced a severe financial crisis.

Lieut-Colonel K. C. Weldon completed his four-year period of command in January 1928 and was succeeded by Lieut-Colonel R. T. Foster.

In the late summer of 1928 the Battalion moved to London for four weeks, where it took over ceremonial guard duties from the Brigade of Guards.

The Battalion was to remain at Shorncliffe until mid-November 1932 when it moved to Lichfield.

2nd Battalion

Early in 1919 the 2nd Bn. The Sherwood Foresters left Germany for Woking in Surrey. Later they went to Clipstone Camp, Nottinghamshire, to prepare for overseas service.

In the autumn the Battalion, at full strength, under Lieut-Colonel R. J. F. Taylor left for Egypt and this began a tour of foreign service which was to last for nearly seventeen years and take them to many lands under a variety of conditions. It is worth recording that the only Officer members of the Battalion at that time who had served with it in 1914 were Lieut-Colonel Taylor and Major F. Tomlinson.

The journey to Egypt was made through France, by the Boulogne–Marseilles route. In Egypt the Battalion was stationed at Mustapha Pasha near Alexandria; but had one Company in Cyprus—that being considered a sufficient regular garrison for what was at that time, a very peaceful island. Training facilities were fairly good in Egypt and recreation consisted of cricket, football, hockey and boxing, while the Officers made a start at polo. During its stay in Egypt the Battalion had a remarkable run of successes at cricket, association football, cross-country running and hockey (see list at end of Chapter 2).

In January 1922 a move was made to Abbassia, the Battalion then being under Lieut-Colonel R. S. Popham, who had recently taken over command from Lieut-Colonel Taylor. The stay in the new station was a short one, for in April 1922 the 2nd Foresters were suddenly ordered to Constantinople where a Gilbertian situation was developing between the opposing Turkish and Greek forces and the British, French and Italian forces of occupation. On arrival the Battalion relieved three Indian Battalions in camp at Bostandjik (14 miles East of Constantinople).

Before describing the Battalion's adventures in Turkey it will be as well to outline the background of what is known as the Chanak incident.

After their defeats in the war the Turks, discarding for good the rule of the Sultans, looked to Mustapha Kemal, the victor of Gallipoli and the outstanding personality in the country. Taking advantage of the post-war disorganization in Turkey the Greeks, aided and abetted by the British Government under Mr. Lloyd George, advanced into Asia Minor. This aggressive policy was continued when, at the end of 1920, King Constantine returned to the Greek throne. So far the Greeks had had it all their own way; but, under the inspired leadership of Mustapha Kemal, the Turks began to catch up. In March 1922 the British, French and Italian governments made proposals for a Greco-Turkish Armistice. This was accepted by the Greeks, but not by the Turks.

It was soon after this, and no doubt due to the breakdown of the negotiations, that the 2nd Foresters formed part of the reinforcements sent to the area—where Lieut-General Sir Charles Harington commanded a small Allied force occupying Constantinople, and the country on either side of the Bosphorus, as a neutral zone.

On the 18th August 1922 Kemal began to attack the Greeks who, by some abortive troop movements which we need not consider in detail, had placed themselves at a disadvantage. The Greek Army was heavily defeated and put to flight. In these conditions General Harington—whose force was vastly outnumbered by Kemal's men—had the delicate rôle of preventing the Turks entering Constantinople and the Neutral Zone. The task was made more difficult by the withdrawal, on political grounds, of the French and Italian supporting troops; but the situation was handled with consummate skill by Sir Charles Harington and all turned out well in the end.

It was within this scene that the story of the 2nd Foresters at Chanak falls.

In the early summer of 1922 Allied troops were ordered to occupy the Chatalja Lines on the European side of the Straits and maintain the neutral belt. In July the danger came from the Greeks who were threatening to land troops on the northern shore of the Sea of Marmora and occupy Constantinople. On the 30th July the 2nd Foresters (less C Company detailed as camp guard) were ready to move, and on the following day the Battalion embarked at Bostandjik Pier for the European side of the Bosphorus, where they disembarked at Ortakevi and went into Yildiz Barracks.

Early on the 1st August B Company (Captain W. A. Ebsworth) went by train to Ak Bunar Fort, an outpost of the Neutral Zone, and was followed by the rest of the Battalion at 8.15 p.m. The next fortnight was spent in strengthening the defences. On the 14th August Lieut-General Sir Charles Harington and Lord Lee of Fareham (at that time First Lord of the Admiralty) visited the Battalion.

On the 21st August the Battalion was relieved by the 1st Irish Guards, and moved back by march route and sea to Bostandjik, where it arrived at 3.30 a.m. on the 24th. Meanwhile the Turks had carried out a highly successful attack on the Greeks and on the 27th August news was received that Kemalist troops were advancing in strength on Constantinople via Haidar Pasha. Accordingly one Platoon of B Company, under Lieut. W. M. Robinson, was sent to Hereke, on the

Eastern frontier of the Neutral Zone, to report Turkish movements. On the 17th September the rest of B Company, under Captain W. A. Ebsworth, followed.

The extent of Kemal's victory over the Greeks was now becoming apparent and he was reported to be making for Chanak on the shores of the Dardanelles. On the 21st September the Battalion embarked at Bostandjik Pier and arrived at Chanak on the following day. Here the time was spent constructing defences.

On the 26th September they joined a mobile column operating with the object of pushing back Kemalist cavalry patrols. After a few brushes—in which many verbal courtesies were exchanged, but few shots—the Battalion withdrew to Chanak, where it took up positions under the 85th Brigade. Several minor incidents occurred whilst in occupation of these positions; but again these were more verbal than belligerent.

On the 12th October information was received that the Convention of Mudania had been signed on the previous day. The Turks then withdrew and tension relaxed. The Chanak crisis was virtually over and on the 26th October 1922 the 2nd Foresters embarked on H.T. *Huntsgreen* for India.

The following is an extract from a personal letter dated 18th October 1922, from Lieut-General Sir Charles Harington, K.C.B., D.S.O., Commander-in-Chief British Forces at Constantinople, to the Colonel of the Regiment, General Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien:

> 'I have been trying for some time to get an opportunity to send you a line to tell you what a splendid battalion the Foresters with me is. It is far and away the best battalion I have seen since the war. It came to me with a great reputation from Congreve as his best battalion, and it is certainly mine. The battalion is very well commanded by Popham, and has a thoroughly good tone and system from top to bottom. It is now at Chanak, and is one of the battalions which deserve great credit for their patience and restraint during a very trying time. It speaks volumes for their discipline, and it is entirely owing to them that we were able to attain some measure of success at Mudania. I am sorry to say the Foresters are leaving almost at once, as the War Office has wired out to say that they are wanted urgently for reliefs.'

On the 8th November 1922 the 2nd Foresters disembarked at Karachi and by the 16th had arrived at Rawalpindi, in the Punjab, where they took over Victoria Barracks from the 1st Bn. The Cameron Highlanders. Here again it will be helpful to give a brief account of life in the India of those days.

The Army in India in the 1920s was a well-trained, and highly disciplined, professional army consisting of about 60,000 British, 180,000 Indian and 20,000 Gurkha troops. Its armaments were not modern by the European standards of a decade later, but were sufficient for its main rôles—which were the internal security of India and the defence of the North-West frontier. For a British Battalion a tour of duty in India usually lasted some eight to twelve years, during which it spent part of its time on the North-West Frontier under war, or near-war, conditions and part in India proper, usually in the North or Central part of the country.

Except for a few stations like Quetta, Bangalore and Wellington, which had fairly temperate climates, Indian military stations were very hot during the summer months. Each station in the plains, therefore, had one or more hill stations (at altitudes varying from 3000 to 7000 feet) to which British families were sent for the whole hot weather and British troops for at least part of the summer. During the Indian Winter, therefore, from October to March collective training took place in the plains. The summer months from April to September, when the Battalion was located partly in the plains and partly in the hills, were devoted to individual training and leave (both home and local). A feature of life in the hills was khud (i.e. hill) climbing, designed to keep men fit and give practice in mountain warfare.

For the officer India offered a good life. Polo, hunting (in some stations), big-game shooting and similar pastimes unobtainable in other places—or too expensive elsewhere for most pockets—could be indulged in with comparative ease. There was also a very pleasant social life. The whole was rounded off by several months' home leave every third year and several weeks' local leave in other years. Indian servants were cheap and plentiful and usually very efficient.

The soldier's life was perhaps less attractive. It is true that there were unrivalled opportunities for sport which included many, such as shooting, which would not have been obtainable elsewhere. The bulk of the men were, however, unmarried and there was a definite absence of congenial female society such as the soldier gets in most garrison towns at home. This was perhaps the worst feature of the soldier's life in pre-war India. Nevertheless, many of the men liked it and not a few volunteered to remain in India, when their time came to go home. It should be pointed out that the officer often served for ten or more years overseas, whereas British soldiers rarely did more than three or four years unless they volunteered to do more. This was the chief reason for the more generous allotment of home leave to officers.

Rawalpindi had a somewhat larger garrison than most stations, but otherwise was typical of military life in India. It was the Headquarters of Northern Command, whose commander was responsible for the direction of operations—which were of very frequent occurrence—on the Frontier. As was customary the cantonments, or barracks, were quite separate from the quarters occupied by the civil administration and from the native quarters.

The hill stations for Rawalpindi were in the Murree Hills, which besides having a good climate had excellent facilities for weapon training, khud climbing and training in mountain warfare.

The centenary of the 95th fell on the 1st September 1923; but for a variety of reasons it was found impracticable to hold all the celebrations then, and it was decided to postpone some of them for four months, until Christmas week. Among other events they consisted of Trooping the Colour (held in September) and an all-ranks ball which took place at Christmas.

Early in 1924 it became apparent that the Battalion ram, Derby XIII, was suffering from old age and that his days were numbered. It was, therefore, decided to ask His Highness The Maharao of Kotah if he would present the 95th with another one. This His Highness was pleased to do and Derby XIV arrived on the 21st June 1924.

Service on the North-West Frontier was the ambition of every Battalion in India, although its advantages became less apparent after a few months there.

The name North-West Frontier, or Tribal Territory, was given to the strip of barren mountain country, from 25 to 50 miles wide and nearly 200 miles long, separating British India from Afghanistan. It was inhabited by a number of Muslim tribes—Wazirs, Afridis, Mohmands, Mahsuds and others—all known by the general name of Pathans. They were a wild and savage people among whom war, raiding and looting were regarded as the only worthwhile occupations. It was the policy of the Government of India to maintain the independence of these tribes, as a 'buffer' against Afghanistan and also against a possible Russian advance on India. There were, however, two reasons which made it necessary to maintain troops in Tribal Territory. Firstly to counter Afghan influence, and prevent eventual annexation; secondly to prevent the tribes raiding into India, as they had a habit of doing if not carefully watched. Garrisons were kept at various places of which Razmak was of great importance. There the troops lived under almost active service conditions, with permanent piquets on the surrounding hills and a mobile column ready to move off instantly to any threatened area. The country was never peaceful; but so long as the tribesmen confined their warlike and raiding activities to enterprises against each other the Government of India was not greatly concerned. Very frequently, however, military operations were necessary. Sometimes there was a general revolt, usually instigated by a religious leader, against the British and Indian troops; sometimes a raid into the North-West Frontier Province; sometimes an ambush or sniping within Tribal Territory, or some British or prominent Indian subject would be kidnapped and held to ransom. These were the usual causes which brought about the many little frontier wars. On the whole the Pathan was a likeable rascal, who provided many generations of regular British and Indian soldiers with useful and realistic practice in their profession.

The 95th's next move was to Razmak on the North-West Frontier. The Battalion marched the whole way—a distance of some 300 miles. On the 16th March 1926 they arrived at Bannu under Lieut-Colonel R. S. Hart (who had by this time succeeded to command) and at 2.30 on the afternoon of the 23rd they marched into Razmak. The families went to Dalhousie, a hill station in Jammu State, about 100 miles North of Lahore.

Life in Razmak, although strenuous and lacking some of the amenities of Indian proper, was not unpleasant. The climate was fairly good and leave to India generous. Apart from guards and piquet duties and normal training, the main activity took the form of reconnaissances in force or 'flag marches'—the term given to organized visits by troops to areas where the inhabitants were known to be unruly.

Three weeks after their arrival in Razmak the 2nd Foresters marched with the 'Wana Column'. The objects of this expedition were to ascertain the attitude of the Wana Wazir tribes to an eventual British occupation of Wana, and to reconnoitre the route for a permanent road between Razmak and Wana. The Composition of the Column was as follows:

Commander	Colonel-Commandant* O. C. Borrett
Troops	23rd Indian Pack Brigade, R.A.
	Two Sections, No. 11 Company (Armd. Cars) R. Tank Corps
	2nd Foresters
	14th Field Company Sappers and Miners
	3/2nd Bombay Pioneers
	3/11th Sikhs
	2/1st Gurkha Rifles
	2/2nd Gurkha Rifles
	Brigade Ammunition Column
	27th Field Ambulance
	and various other administrative units.

The Column left Razmak on the 19th April 1926 at 8 a.m., with the 2nd Foresters and one Pack Battery acting as advanced guard. The strength of the Battalion was 18 Officers and 600 men, the balance being left behind as part of the Razmak garrison.

The first day's march was a short one of 6 miles to Tauda China, the Foresters providing piquets en route.

It should be mentioned that the route in Frontier Warfare was nearly always flanked by steep hills. If these were unoccupied the temptation for the tribesmen to sit up on the hillside and snipe a column, perhaps 3 or 4 miles long, was almost irresistible. It was, therefore, an absolute rule for the Advanced Guard (which included the Piqueting Troops) to post piquets on suitable heights on the flanks. These protected the main body of the column as it passed along, and were withdrawn by the Rear Guard. As can be imagined this was a slow business if the flanking hills were high and steep. Sometimes, if the tribesmen were actively hostile, it was necessary to fight in order to establish a piquet.

By 12.30 p.m. all piquets had been withdrawn and the Column was safely in camp. In accordance with one of the many time-honoured rituals of Frontier Warfare the force 'stood-to' at dusk at 7 p.m.

The advance continued until the 6th May, when the Column reached the neighbourhood of Wana. No very notable incidents occurred, but there were a number of minor ones. After the sixth day's march to Sarwakai the Battalion found camp piquets for the night. No. 1 Piquet, found by A Company and located on a hill about 1000 yards from camp, fired a few shots at something approaching the post. At daylight a dead camel was found near the piquet. The next night a few shots were fired at this piquet, no doubt in retaliation for the loss of the camel.

On the ninth day the Column split and sent an offshoot to Dargai Oba where a supply dump was to be built up. Here the Column was joined by Mr. E. B. Howell, the Resident of Waziristan, who was accompanied by the Political Agent and 500 South Waziristan Scouts.

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* After World War I the rank of Brigadier-General was replaced by that of Colonel-Commandant—which, after a few years was, in turn, replaced by that of Brigadier.

On the 9th May, three days after reaching Wana, the Resident held a Jirgah* just south of the camp at 9 a.m. This was attended by the Column Commander and his staff, all Commanding Officers and several other officers. B Company of the 2nd Foresters, under Captain J. H. M. Douglas, provided the Guard of Honour to the Resident. About fifty Maliks†, and their satellites, attended—nearly all of whom were armed with rifles of varying vintages.

That night the camp was sniped, one mule driver of the Indian Army Service Corps being wounded.

The return route to Razmak—reached on the 18th day—was the same as the outgoing one and the journey was accomplished without incident.

The exploits of this Column can hardly be described as an operation of war; but it was something more than an exercise, and was of a kind which gave the troops the very best type of practical training. It was considered good fun by the young British soldiers of those days.

The Wana Column of April and May 1926 was typical of many others. They are of historical interest as examples of a specialized form of warfare, practised by the Army in India, which is not likely to be repeated.

On the 28th October the Viceroy (Lord Irwin) visited Razmak. This unusual event was accompanied by the most elaborate measures for his safety. Indeed they seemed to preclude the possibility of anybody, except those actually guarding him, getting nearer than a thousand yards or so!

A British unit's sojourn on the Frontier was normally one year, but in the case of the Foresters it was less. On the 10th December 1926 the Battalion marched out of the camp for the last time, headed by the bands of all units and with the road lined by men of the 2/1st Gurkha Rifles.

Arriving at Bannu on the 14th December they moved to Karachi—which was to be the Battalion's new station—in two train parties. The move was completed on the 21st December. During the War of 1914–18 a serious troop-train disaster had occurred in India in which a number of newly arrived British soldiers had died of heat and thirst. Since then the arrangements for travelling had been greatly improved. Special troop coaches were usually provided, equipped with fans, beds, washing facilities and, when necessary, provided with ice for keeping down the temperature. These precautions were not, of course, necessary in the winter—when the 2nd Foresters travelled to Karachi—but they are of general interest.

Karachi is on the Western coast of India in Sind. Although very hot in midsummer it has a pleasant climate for nine months of the year. It is a considerable sea port and at that time was being developed as an airport on the route to the Far East. There are very good facilities for sport, particularly boating, sea-fishing and swimming; but it was not one of the great military centres of India. It was excellent for elementary training; but, owing to the small size of the garrison, there

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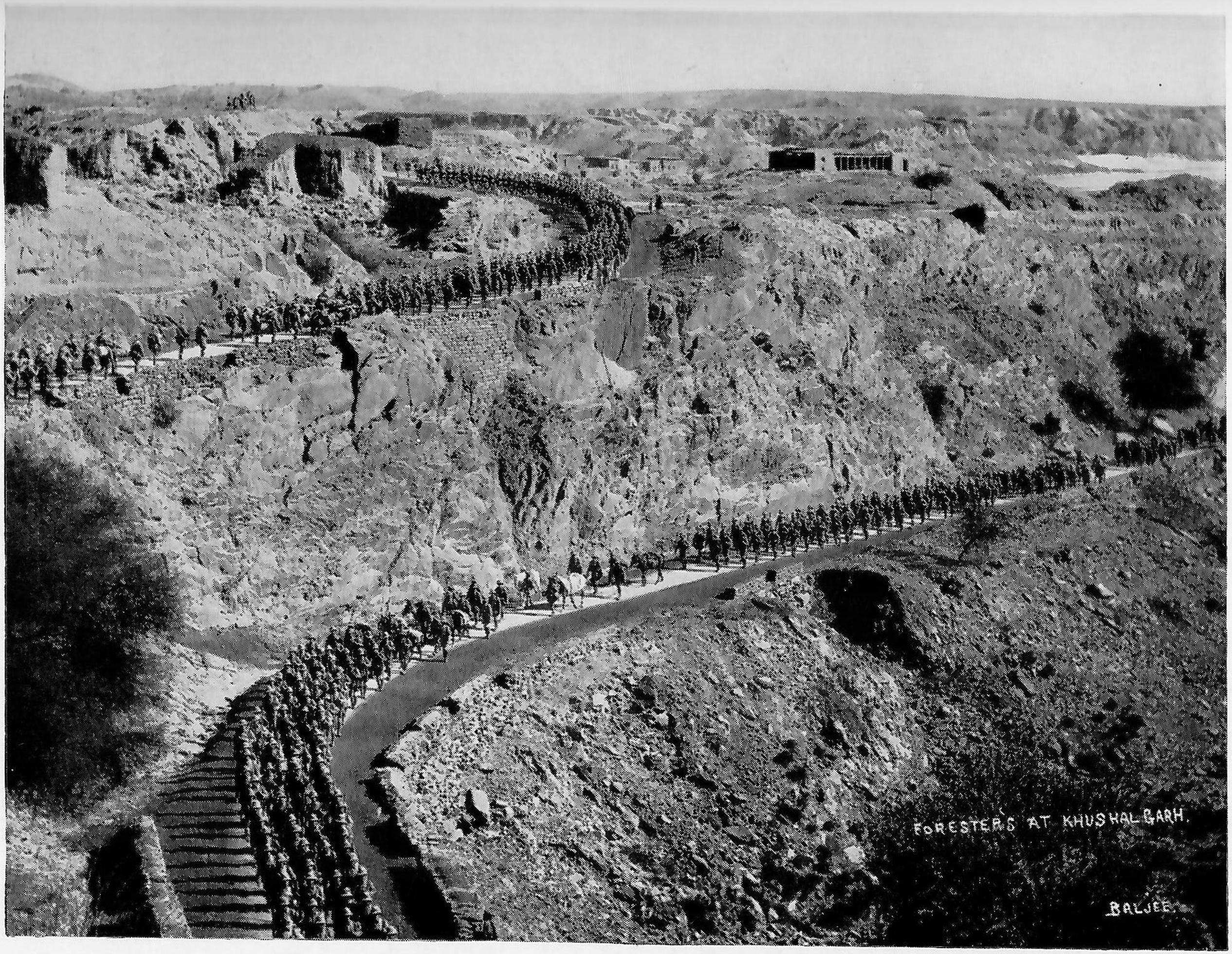
* Jirgah—A conference or meeting with the local leaders at which certain ceremonies, such as the presentation of gifts and distribution of food, were customary.

† Malik—Religious leader.


FORESTERS AT KHUSHALGARH.
BALJEE.

The 2nd Battalion in India, January 1926
On the march near Khushal Garh, en route for the North-West Frontier

was little realistic collective training. Life in Karachi was mainly one of routine, enlivened by periodical ceremonial occasions.

On the 8th April 1927 the 2nd Foresters were presented with new Colours. The presentation was made by the Commander-in-Chief, Field-Marshal Sir William Birdwood, on the parade ground of Napier Barracks. The Colours were consecrated by the Bishop of Lahore, the Right Reverend H. B. Durrant. This was Derby XIV's first big ceremonial occasion and it is satisfactory to record that he behaved in an exemplary manner.

On the 11th December the Battalion furnished a Guard of Honour at Karachi Station for King Amanullah of Afghanistan who was passing through the port on his way to Europe.

In February 1930 Lieut-Colonel C. H. Dumbell took over command and in the following October, after a stay in Karachi of nearly four years, the 95th moved to Multan.

Multan was regarded by many as the worst station in India for British troops. It had only one British unit, and the amenities were generally poor. It was excessively hot in the summer and the accommodation was very old fashioned. The hill station to which all families, and 50 per cent of the men at a time, went in the summer was Dalhousie, about 300 miles distant.

The Battalion was to remain in this station for three uneventful years. From accounts written at the time it seems that the Foresters did not dislike Multan as much as some units. They found that this small garrison, away from the centre of military activity and off the beaten track of inspecting officers, had its advantages.

THE TERRITORIAL BATTALIONS and THE DEPOT

A close association between Regular and Territorial Battalions of a Regiment is only possible when one of the regular Battalions is stationed in, or near, the Regimental area. These occasions were rare in the inter-war years: more often one of the regular Battalions was somewhere on the other side of the world, and the other Battalion also too far away to make close liaison possible. It, therefore, fell mostly on the Depot to provide the link between Regulars and Territorials. The Depot of The Sherwood Foresters at Normanton Barracks, Derby was not only a training centre for recruits, it was also the Headquarters and Home of the Regiment. It was there that many of its trophies, portraits of its famous soldiers and records were kept. It was the Headquarters of the Old Comrades' Association and the place where many social functions and ceremonies were held. It was the accounting centre for all Regimental funds.

(It will be appropriate to tell the story of the Depot and Territorial Battalions, and relate accounts of ceremonies and incidents affecting the Foresters as a whole, as a connected story, and the rest of this chapter is devoted to that end. The latter years of the inter-war period (1931 to 1939) have been dealt with in a similar manner in Chapter 2.)

As already related one of the first and most important duties of the Depot after the cessation of hostilities was to receive the Cadres of several Battalions of the Regiment (1st, 2nd, 9th, 10th, 11th and 16th) and arrange for the despatch of men due for demobilization to Ripon for dispersal.

On the 15th October 1919, after five years in its expanded war-time form, the Depot returned to a peace footing. At the end of January 1920 Major C. R. Mortimore handed over command to Major C. D. Harvey.

The Territorial Force started to reform in the summer of 1919, on very much the same lines—as far as the Infantry was concerned—as it had been in 1914. The years which followed were difficult ones. In many units there was a shortage of recruits, but on the whole recruiting was surprisingly good for a force expected to serve without remuneration in a war-weary country. Funds for the Army as a whole were cut to the barest minimum, and when it came to the 'share out' the Territorial Force infantry was well down the list. Right up to the outbreak of war Territorial units remained pitifully short of modern equipment. Nevertheless, in spite of discouragement, in every unit there was to be found a small band of devoted officers, N.C.O.s and old soldiers who were prepared to spend their leisure in the service of their country. They were the 'hard-core' of the Territorial Army, whose services have never been properly recognized by their fellow countrymen. It was they who made 'bricks without straw' and kept the flag flying, and who laid the foundations of the fine units which made up our Territorial Divisions and, in the latter years of World War II, chased our enemies to defeat and destruction.

In 1921 His Majesty King George V ordered that the designation of the 'Territorial Force' be changed to 'Territorial Army', as a mark of appreciation for the great services rendered by Territorials in the 1914–18 War.

By June 1919 the four non-regular Battalions of the Foresters who enjoyed a permanent existence were established in their home Headquarters, namely:

5th Battalion (Lieut-Colonel T. C. Newbold) in Derby
6th Battalion (Lieut-Colonel E. Hall) in Chesterfield
The Robin Hoods (Lieut-Colonel A. W. Brewill) in Nottingham
8th Battalion (Lieut-Colonel B. Abel Smith) in Newark

They were grouped together in the 139th Infantry Brigade under Colonel G. D. Goodman.

At the beginning of August 1920 units of the 139th Brigade went to Scarborough for their first post-war camp. It is recorded that the 5th Battalion mustered 16 officers and 380 other ranks and other Battalions in the Brigade were about the same.

On the 11th November 1920 a party of Foresters under Major C. E. Hudson, V.C., D.S.O., M.C., represented the Regiment at the funeral of 'An Unknown Warrior' at Westminster Abbey.

Nineteen-twenty-one was the year of the coal strike and in anticipation of unrest, and if necessary to help operate essential services, part of the Army Reserve was called up. On the 12th April 10 Officers and 388 Other-rank reservists of the Foresters reported for duty at the Depot. Most of them were sent to the 1st Battalion in camp in Kensington Gardens, London; but the trouble did not last long and by the end of April the reservists had returned to their homes.

The 22nd October 1922 saw a ceremony at Derby at which the Colours of five war-time Forester Battalions—the 15th, 1st Garrison, 51st, 52nd and 53rd—were handed over to the custody of the Vicar and Churchwardens of St Giles Parish Church, Old Normanton, in which they still occupy an honoured position in the Church.

One Territorial camp was much like another and it would make tedious reading, and contribute little of interest in the history of the Regiment, to describe each in detail.

In 1922 the 139th (Sherwood Forester) Brigade went to camp at Welbeck Abbey. the seat of the Duke of Portland. In 1925 it was at Catterick in Yorkshire, and while there the Colonel of the Regiment, General Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien, paid them a visit.

A big event in the story of the Regiment took place on the 6th August 1923. On that day the Regimental Memorial Tower, near the village of Crich, was dedicated by the Lord Bishop of Southwell. This landmark, located in the centre of the Forester country, stands 1000 feet up on the Crich Cliff. It was erected at a cost of £4000 to the memory of 11,409 Foresters who gave their lives in the years 1914–19, and to 140,000 who served in the Regiment during World War I.

The ceremony was attended by the Colonel of the Regiment, General Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien, the Duke of Portland, the Duke of Devonshire and many thousands who had been members of, or associated with, the Regiment.

In 1926 occurred the great industrial dispute known as the 'General Strike'. This strike, which affected the whole Trade Union movement, was prolonged by the Coal Strike, and between them they went on throughout the summer and part of the autumn. The essential services were maintained partly by the enrolment of civilian volunteers and partly by utilizing regular servicemen, although the latter were held mostly as a reserve to support the civil police in the event of rioting.

Although it was generally accepted that a Territorial soldier, as a citizen, must in law support the civil power in an emergency, the government realized that there were strong political reasons against employing Territorials, as such, in an industrial dispute of this kind, and they very wisely refrained from doing so.

Nevertheless, many members of the Territorial Army enrolled in the force of Special Constabulary which was raised to reinforce the regular police. As it turned out there were no serious breaches of the peace and the Special Constabulary was not involved to any great extent. In some parts of the country, including Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire, there were many anomalies, the same man being a Territorial Soldier, a Special Constable—and a Striker; but it was all taken in good part and there were very few incidents.

Neither of the regular Battalions of the Foresters were involved in the dispute, the 1st Battalion being in Northern Ireland and the 2nd in India. The Regimental Depot 'stood to' in aid of the Civil Power.

On the 9th July 1928 the 8th Battalion provided a Guard of Honour on the occasion of the visit of His Majesty King George V to Newark.

On the 12th August 1930 the Regiment suffered a sad blow by the death of its Colonel, General Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien. On the 4th August he had attended the unveiling of a Memorial at Pozières in France, when he was apparently in excellent health. Eight days later, after a visit to the Foresters Territorial Brigade in the Lake District, he was involved in a motor accident near Aldershot and died almost at once from his injuries.

This much-beloved man had been Colonel of the Sherwood Foresters since June 1905—an example to all, not only in soldierly qualities, but as a Christian English gentleman. He will ever be remembered as the hero of the Battle of Le Cateau, an action which many think saved the B.E.F. and the left flank of the Allies, during the retreat from Mons in 1914. It is less well known that he was present at the disastrous Battle of Isandlhwana in the Zulu War of 1879.

The Sherwood Foresters were fully represented at their late Colonel's Funeral Service, which took place at St. Peter's, Eaton Square, London, on the 16th August, and at the Memorial Service in Derby Cathedral on the following day.

General Smith-Dorrien was succeeded as Colonel by Lieut-General Sir William Marshall, a Forester who had been Commander-in-Chief in Mesopotamia in the latter part of World War I, and responsible for the highly successful operations there against the Turks.

By the beginning of the 1930s we were approaching the end of what had been called 'The Lean Years'. The Years of Re-armament will be described in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 2

BETWEEN THE WARS—II

The Years of Rearmament—1931 to 1939

The previous chapter ended with the 1st Battalion at Shorncliffe and the 2nd Battalion at Multan in India. The next nine years were to see the rise of Hitler and the Nazi regime in Germany, and British rearmament.

This period also saw a change-over between the two regular Forester Battalions, the 1st Battalion going abroad in September 1935 and the 2nd Battalion coming to a home station (Guernsey) in April 1936.

Before telling the Regimental story it will be as well to give a brief account of the momentous events of the 1930s, which were to lead to World War II and eventually to world conditions as we know them today.

Early in 1933 Herr Hitler became head of the German Reich. By the average citizen in Great Britain this was not regarded as an event of particular significance. The Germans had been soundly beaten only fifteen years before, they were practically unarmed and, by the process which became known as 'wishful thinking', it was hoped that the Nazis would confine their activities to within the Reich. When, however, the aged President Hindenburg died in 1934 the new German leader was revealed in his true colours. His policy included the abrogation of the Treaty of Versailles—the return to Germany of her lost provinces and colonies, the incorporation of Austria within the Reich and rearmament.

Events followed in quick succession. Without firing a shot Germany recovered the Saar (1935) and Rhineland (1936), seized Austria (1938) and after the Munich Conference (September 1938) occupied parts of Czechoslovakia. Meanwhile Germany's friend—later to become an active ally—Italy, had conquered Abyssinia (1935–36). In the East, Japan had given warning of her policy of aggression by a campaign, started in 1931, on the Asiatic mainland to annex Manchuria.

The military clause of the Versailles Treaty—restricting the German armed forces to 100,000 men—was disclaimed and Hitler began a massive programme of rearmament. 'Guns before butter' became the German slogan. The British reply to this was at first a mere trickle and confined almost entirely to the Royal Air Force. After more than a decade of peace we had lost our skill at making armaments. We were to learn that the journey from the drawing board to a weapon in the hands of troops in quantities, can be a long and tedious one.

It was not until after the Munich Conference between Mr. Neville Chamberlain, the Prime Minister, and Herr Hitler in September 1938 that the alarm was sounded. By this time Mr. (later Lord) Hore-Belisha had become Secretary of State for War and in mid-April 1939 he announced the doubling of the Territorial Army. Later in the month the Prime Minister made known the government's decision to introduce conscription—for the first time in our history in peace.

This, the general background to the few years before the outbreak of World War II, should be borne in mind when reading about the activities of the Foresters in the same period.

REGULAR BATTALIONS

1st Battalion

In mid-November 1932 the 1st Foresters, then commanded by Lieut-Colonel A. A. Fenn, moved to Lichfield. This was a pleasant station with hunting and a garrison shoot for the officers and good opportunities for sport and recreation for other ranks. For three years the Foresters enjoyed the normal life of a garrison town in peace. It was in this year that the Battalion won the Army Football Association Cup for the third year in succession—a feat which exceeded the 2nd Battalion's wins in 1911 and 1912.

In the summer of 1935 opportunity was taken of the Battalion's comparatively close proximity to visit the Regimental area for a number of functions.

The first of these took place on the 29th June 1935 when, on the Forest Ground at Nottingham in the presence of a large and distinguished company, His Royal Highness the Duke of Gloucester presented new Colours to the Battalion. The old Colours—which had been presented on the 30th April 1912 at Secunderabad in India by General Sir O'Moore Creagh, V.C., G.C.B., G.C.I.E.—were laid up in St. Mary's Church, Nottingham. This was the first time for 150 years that the 1st Bn. The Sherwood Foresters had visited the City of Nottingham.

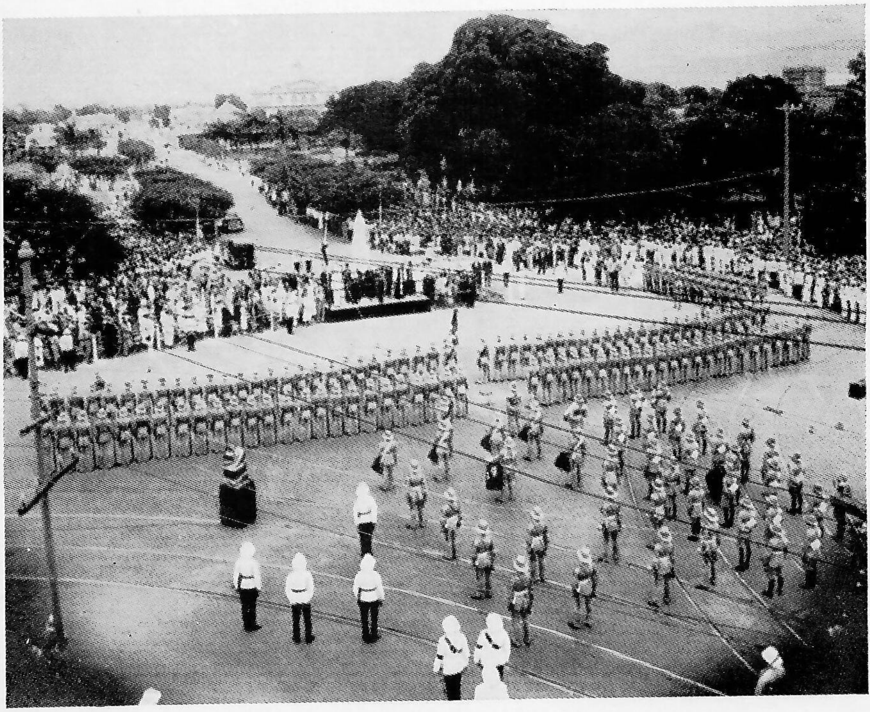
Nottingham was the scene of another big function on the 8th July when the Battalion was given a Civic Reception by the Lord Mayor and Corporation.

A little more than two months later, in September 1935, the 1st Foresters sailed for Jamaica. On arrival they were quartered at Kingston, with one Company at Newcastle; but on the 1st October B and C Companies went to Bermuda, more than 1000 miles to the North.

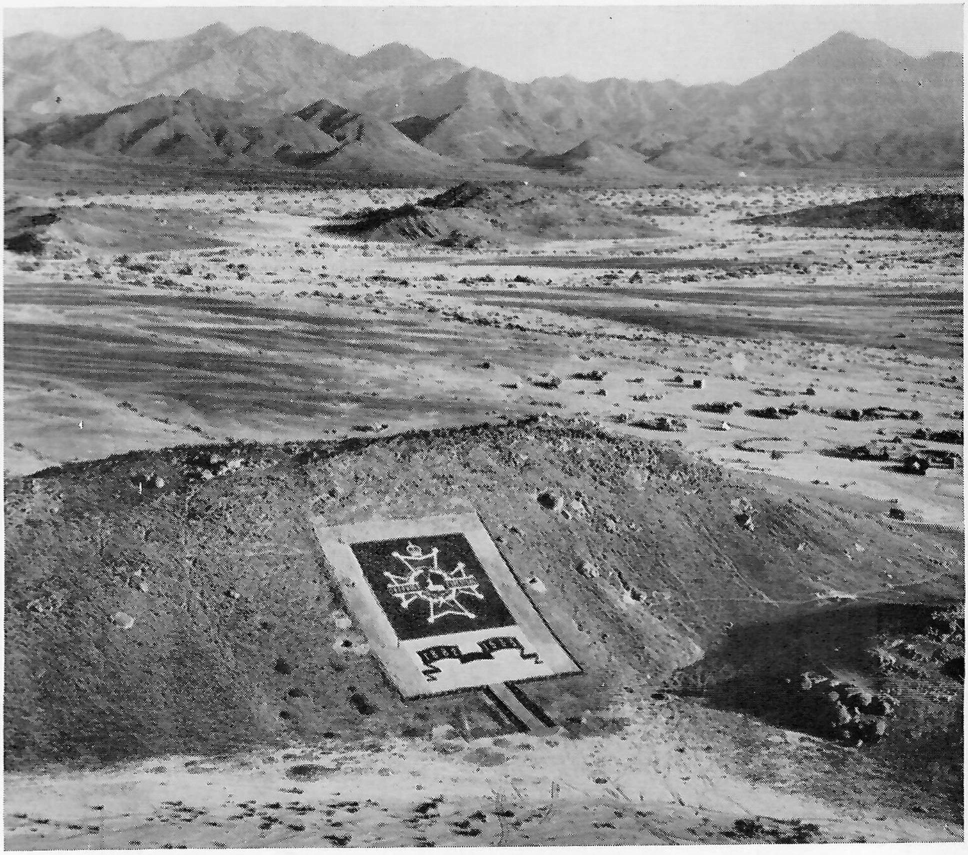
As training grounds Jamaica and Bermuda were far from ideal. There were no other regular troops, and as the Battalion was split in two, no training above Company level was possible. The climate was, however, good and the social life for officers excellent, although not so good for other ranks. To both the inhabitants were most hospitable. The general opinion was that Jamaica and Bermuda were good places to have seen; but, from a soldiering point of view, one did not want to stay in either for too long.

In January 1936 command of the Battalion was taken over by Lieut-Colonel

The 1st Battalion Football Team
Winners of the Army Football Cup, 1932



1st Battalion in Jamaica, 1936
Guard of Honour provided on the occasion of the accession of His Majesty King Edward VIII—Victoria Square, Kingston, 2nd January 1936



2nd Battalion in the Sudan, 1935
The badge built on the hillside at Gebeit

Bordon, March 1939. Reunion of the 1st and 2nd Battalions
Sergeant Grainger (Chelsea pensioner) and Boy Prior drink a toast

A. T. Miller, who was in turn succeeded in October 1937 by Lieut-Colonel J. S. Steele* from the Royal Ulster Rifles.

In May and June 1938 the Jamaica portion of the Battalion was involved in security measures in connection with rioting on the Island. The firing of the annual weapon courses had to be interrupted by D Company who moved to Kingston to help the Civil Police. Later Detachments went to other parts of the Island.

The early days of 1939 found the 1st Foresters preparing to leave the West Indies for Palestine, via the United Kingdom. Both in Jamaica and Bermuda their departure was preceded by a round of farewell ceremonies and parties which testified, in a most touching manner, to the Battalion's popularity among all classes. Headquarters, A and D Companies sailed from Jamaica in H.T. *Ettrick* on the 29th January bound for Bermuda. There the ship picked up the rest of the Battalion and resumed the voyage on the 4th February, arriving at Southampton on the 15th.

Meeting of 1st and 2nd Foresters in England

By this time (as recorded later) the 2nd Battalion had returned to the United Kingdom and was stationed at Bordon. During the latter half of February and early March 1939 both Battalions of the Foresters were in England—a very unusual occurrence in the Infantry. The first fortnight of the 1st Battalion's period at home was spent by most personnel on leave. The Battalion then assembled at Bordon in the first week of March, alongside the 2nd Battalion, where men for early discharge were transferred from the 1st to 2nd Battalion, and the 1st Battalion 'took over' a big overseas draft from the 2nd.

Although there was much to be done in preparing the 1st Battalion for its onward move to Palestine, time was found to celebrate this great meeting, the second in recent history, with an appropriate ceremonial parade, and a number of social functions in which all ranks participated. The parade was inspected by General Sir Charles Harington under whom the 2nd Battalion had served at Chanak in 1922.

1st Battalion (continued)—Palestine

The 1st Foresters left Southampton in the troopship *Dunera* on the 9th March and arrived at Haifa in Palestine on the 21st.

Since 1920 Great Britain had been the Mandatory Power in Palestine with the unenviable, and as it turned out impossible, task of keeping the peace between Jew and Arab and maintaining friendly relations with both races. Always the country was in a disturbed condition, with Jewish and Arab underground forces fighting each other, and the British troops involved in hostilities with one or both in their efforts to maintain law and order.

On arrival at Haifa the Battalion was quartered in the Peninsula Barracks. After a short period of 'settling in' they soon began operations against the Arabs, who were then in open rebellion against the security forces.

The two accounts of operations which follow are typical of the Foresters' activities in Palestine between the time of their arrival and the outbreak of war in September 1939. Both accounts were prepared for the 1939 number of the Regimental Annual, but were not published owing to the war.

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* Now General Sir James S. Steele, G.C.B., K.B.E., D.S.O., M.C., LL.D.

(a) *General Account of Operations prepared by the Battalion Intelligence Officer*

Having become partially acclimatized to our barracks, which as usual are 'shortly' due for demolition and replacement, we took over the various detachments in our area. They consisted firstly of 'A' Company under Major B. G. Allen, at Karkur, some 20 miles to the south of Haifa, near the western entrance to the famous Megiddo pass. This Company had the tasks of guarding a 'cage' containing some 350 suspected rebels, protecting a large group of Jewish settlements, and hunting the local rebels, of whom a certain Sabri El Hamid was the most conspicuous. It remained at Karkur till the 8th of May, when the inhabitants of the 'cage' were moved elsewhere.

Secondly we found a platoon post at Dalyat al Karmil, a village in the Carmel range some 10 miles South-East of Haifa. This post protects two Druse villages that are occasionally inclined to loyalty, and also prevents their internal dissensions from reaching too serious proportions.

Thirdly, we provided a Town platoon, then known as the 'British Sailors Society Detachment', after the building in which it was housed. This platoon was under the Town Commander, an appointment held by an Officer of the Regiment, and acted as an additional police force in the Town itself.

Lastly we provided our quota for a conglomeration known as the 'duty company', a 'formation' composed of men of many units augmented by approximately 100 temporarily enlisted Jews disguised as troops and sporting army badges. From it was provided the multitude of guards and escorts required in and around Haifa. It was soon found, however, to be an unsatisfactory arrangement, and the personnel of the duty company were then taken to our bosom together with the duties they performed. Our barracks thereby acquired a cosmopolitan appearance, and men from the Midlands, Wales and Glasgow parade shoulder to shoulder with the exiled sons of Eastern Europe.

A brief description of our operational area may perhaps not be amiss at this stage. The flat coastal plain between Haifa and Acre is covered with Jewish settlements, to a depth of 5 miles, where a range of hills rises slowly to a height of about 600 feet. Of the several Arab villages in these hills the principal is Shafa Amr, dominated by an old fort occupied through the centuries by Romans, Crusaders, and the Turks from whom it takes its present form. This Northern part of our area is clearly divided from the rest by the valley of the Brook Kishon, which enters the coastal plain through a narrow defile from the great plain of Esdraelon. For the Western part of this plain, dotted with numerous Jewish settlements, and the tents of Arab Bedouins, we are responsible. South-West of the Kishon the Carmel range rises sharply to its highest point at about 1500 feet, where Elijah confounded the Prophets of Baal. The Carmel Range in common with other mountains in Northern Palestine seems to consist of an enormous heap of stones, to which patches of stunted scrub cling tenaciously. Narrow at the northern Haifa end the mountain wedge broadens till it drops to the Musmuss Pass (Megiddo) which formed the Southern boundary of our original area. On its west a narrow coastal plain contains Arab villages, till south of Zichron Ya'Aqov, a pre-war Jewish colony, it broadens to include Jewish orange groves, vineyards and corn fields. This area of hill and plain provides many instances of Jew and Arab intermingled in closer juxtaposition, and consequent opportunities for inter-racial strife.

Prior to our arrival, however, the rebel element had been well and truly hunted and punished by our predecessors. It soon became clear that the enemy will seldom engage a body of troops even at long range, let alone attempt any of the pitched battles of the past. The small gangs that remain prefer to terrorize the villages and extract money from them for their own ends, to suppress any tendency to support the government by assassination and abduction, and to snipe Jewish settlements at night. This latter amusement produces much 'sound and fury' from both sides, but little else.

Moreover, most of the methods devised for dealing with the situation have become somewhat stereotyped and too well known to the gangs. The most common of these is the 'check search'. A cordon is first established around a village, and at first light the 'air pin' arrives. One or more planes fly over the village dropping pamphlets to warn the inhabitants that they must not attempt to leave. If the barking of innumerable pariah dogs has not previously warned any 'bad hats' who are present, the arrival of the 'air' is also a signal that they should take cover in their favourite hiding place. Most of the inhabitants, however, prefer to prepare to receive the searching troops and start conveying chairs, tables and coffee to the threshing floor which they know will be used for the check. The search then starts and any males who have not already seated themselves in readiness are rounded up with many 'Yalla's' and 'Imshi's' while the women are confined to the Mosque. The checking then starts. All the men pass the covered truck, from a peep-hole in which the informers pick out the gangsters—and their own creditors. This form of operation seldom catches a big leader, but it is successful in ridding the villages temporarily of many of the lesser ruffians, who have at some time or another participated in the rebellion.

The Battalion has carried out many check searches both in the village and in the Arab quarters of Haifa. It has also spent many hours searching for arms, which are now so carefully concealed, that the chance of finding them without the help of an informer is almost negligible. Platoons have escorted police-dogs trailing from the scenes of murders, landmines and acts of sabotage. A Platoon has lived for days in a Jewish settlement endeavouring to ambush Arab snipers. Sections have ambushed many tracks. On one of these occasions a man was captured in possession of important letters to rebel leaders. On another a small gang, which had just damaged the pipe-line, was heard coming nearer and nearer, but turned aside just before they could be seen in the light of the moon. The time has now come, however, when the soldier in Palestine is also expected to be a peace-maker. Mainly with this object companies and platoons have lived for weeks in several Arab villages, and visit others frequently. During these visits we exchange hospitality with the mukhtars and elders, and discuss a variety of topics in a friendly atmosphere. They will invariably promise their assistance; but alas their villages have no knowledge of any rebels or arms!

As one makes contacts, however, so the supply of information which is essential to success in operations improves. Some of our most useful friends have been a clan known as the Mukbels. This family were formerly active gangsters, but became involved in a blood feud which estranged them from the rebels and made them our allies. They have helped us in finding many arms, and on one occasion led a platoon for three days in search of a gang which narrowly evaded us.

(b) *Report on 'Haicol A' Operation on 18/19 August 1939.*

'Haicol A'—consisting of Captain T. B. Elliott and Column Headquarters, one Platoon 'C' Company, one platoon Headquarter Company and one Platoon Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders attached to 'A' Company—left Barracks at 0815 hrs. on 18th August 1939, for operations in the Arraba area. Columns from 2 Leicesters, 1 S. Staffords and 1 Welch were to co-operate and O.C. 1 S. Staffords was commanding the whole operation. The Foresters column proceeded immediately to Arama where arrangements were made for transport to rendezvous at Marcol after it had taken the column to Mughar. Mughar was reached at 1045 hrs. The column however, did not leave Mughar until an hour later, owing to (a) the breakdown of a donkey lorry and (b) delay caused by bringing in a protective section which had been posted on the roof of one of the houses in Mughar.

As the column was leaving Mughar a gang of about 10 armed men was seen in the large olive groves West and South-West of the village. Two platoons were immediately sent to cut off the gang on either flank, while the third platoon attacked five minutes later through the olive groves. A call was sent asking for assistance from the air, with the request that they would pin the rebels on the South-West edge of the grove. Before the air arrived, however, and about 15 minutes after the call was sent a gang of 30 to 40 men was seen running out of the olive grove in a westerly direction. The air, when they arrived, were unable to locate the enemy for half an hour, but at 1300 hrs. the air and 2nd/Lieut. V. C. W. Sudbury's platoon engaged part of the gang on the slopes East of Pt. 598. The gang had apparently split, as shortly afterwards the Argyll Platoon (under P.S.M. Hunter) came under fire from the high ground at Pt. 304. 2/Lieut. Sudbury's platoon pushed on very fast to the West, and with the assistance of the air pinned down some of the gang and inflicted several casualties. P.S.M. Hunter's platoon—less one section—drove part of the gang, which was in front of it, in a Westerly direction till it reached a track junction.

During this advance the Section and Platoon Headquarters were at one time fired on at close range from the left flank and two of our men were wounded. The Platoon found traces of blood on two or three occasions showing that they had inflicted casualties on the rebels, but no bodies were recovered. It is probable that the part of the gang which they were engaging eventually escaped to the South.

2/Lieut. W. H. A. Becke's platoon which had originally attacked up the olive groves, was left behind and became scattered. Two sections eventually joined P.S.M. Hunter's platoon and a third joined column Headquarters.

Column Headquarters was moving forward in rear of, and between, the two flanking platoons, and eventually made contact with the right of P.S.M. Hunter's platoon. A report then came from the air stating that a gang was pinned to the ground on the far side of the crest. The column Headquarters and the section with it went forward and together with a section of 2/Lieut. Sudbury's platoon, and with air assistance, killed four Arabs in the open.

Whilst their arms were being removed a few shots were fired and Lieut. C. C. Rivett-Carnac, second in command of the column, took a section through the scrub to locate the enemy. Whilst engaging with his revolver two Arabs lying behind cover about ten yards from the scrub, Lieut. Rivett-Carnac was killed and one man wounded. The whole of the party was accounted for by the section. The column concentrated at 1600 hrs. and 2/Lieut. Becke's platoon occupied the neighbouring high ground. At 1700 hrs. the Argyll platoon was sent on to Arraba and at 1745 hrs. the Bde. Comd. arrived. The wounded were evacuated and the column started for Arraba. The whole force left Arraba at 0145 hrs. on the 19th August 1939, and arrived back in barracks at 0445 hrs.

For his part in this action Lieut. V. C. W. Sudbury was awarded the Military Cross.

Casualties to the Foresters' Column were:

Killed	Lieut. C. C. Rivett-Carnac
Wounded . . .	L/Cpl. S. Elton, 1 Foresters Pte. J. Hatcliffe, 1 Foresters Pte. A. Davidson, 1 Argylls

Six enemy bodies were recovered with six rifles, 332 rounds of S.A.A. and a saddlebag of documents.

Later, reliable reports indicate that the actual enemy casualties were 18 dead and many wounded, a proportion of these having been accounted for by air action.

On the 14th June 1939 Lieut-Colonel J. S. Steele had left the Battalion to begin the series of promotions and appointments which were to end as Adjutant-General. He was succeeded by Lieut-Colonel W. A. Ebsworth.

A fortnight after the 'Haicol A' Operation, World War II began, the 1st Foresters being still at Haifa.

2nd Battalion

We left the Foresters at Multan—one of the hottest, and many thought one of the worst, stations in India. In April 1933 Lieut-Colonel J. S. Wilkinson assumed command.

On the 27th November 1933 they left Multan for Bombay, where they were to remain for nearly a year. This was another of India's less attractive stations. The climate was slightly better than Multan, but it was by no means ideal, the opportunities for training were poor and the City itself had little to commend it to Europeans.

The stay there was not long. On the 10th October 1934 the Battalion embarked for East Africa and disembarked at Port Sudan on the 18th. The next eighteen months were to be spent in what was then the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan—a Condominium which was nominally run jointly by Britain and Egypt, but which in practice was mostly a British responsibility.

Although the worst of the summer was over it was still very hot, and when the 95th arrived in Khartoum on the 19th October it was 109°F—a temperature which Bombay could not rival at any time, and Multan only in the height of summer.

In November 1934 Lieut-Colonel R. L. Sherbrooke took over command.

The Battalion was widely scattered, with Companies located as follows:

Headquarters A Company	Khartoum
B Company	Gebeit
D (Support) Company	Atbara
C Company	To Port Said, from whence they went to Cyprus

In the early Spring of 1938 an Advanced Party was sent to Guernsey in anticipation of a move there, and in April the rest of the Battalion followed.

In November 1938 Lieut-Colonel Sherbrooke vacated command and was succeeded by Lieut-Colonel G. M. Gamble.

There is little to tell of the Battalion in the Channel Islands and by the time war broke out in September 1939, it had moved to Bordon, where it was to be part of the spearhead of the B.E.F. which went to France. (Earlier in the chapter it has been related how the 1st and 2nd Battalions were together at Bordon for a few days in March 1939.)

Changes in Organization and Equipment

This is a convenient place to describe some of the changes in organization and equipment which took place before the war, under the direction of Mr. Hore-Belisha, the Secretary of State for War.

Machine-Gun Battalions—disbanded after World War I—were revived in 1936 and four Infantry Regiments were converted to this rôle for allotment on the scale of one Battalion to each Division. Motor Battalions—to form part of Armoured Divisions—were also formed. The bulk of the Infantry, however, remained 'normal' infantry, but differently equipped and differently organized.

Under this reorganization a 'normal' Infantry Battalion consisted of:

Battalion Headquarters
Headquarter Company
Four Rifle Companies

The Machine-Gun Company was abolished on the reinstitution of Machine-Gun Battalions. In addition to Administrative personnel the Headquarter Company consisted of Specialist Platoons—Signal, 3-in. Mortar, Bren Carrier, Transport, etc. Later, during the war, the Headquarter Company was split and an additional Company, known as S (Support) Company, was formed. This absorbed all the operational platoons leaving only administrative personnel in the Headquarter Company. This organization stood the test of war well and, except for minor changes, remained unaltered until the end of hostilities.

Concurrently with this reorganization a variety of new weapons were introduced. The Bren replaced the Lewis gun; 3-in. and 2-in. Mortars, Anti-tank rifles and Bren Carriers were provided, and all Battalion transport was mechanized.

These changes made the Infantry Battalion a much more formidable unit; but they created difficulties, the chief one being that reservists called up on mobilization were unacquainted with the new weapons and motor vehicles.

It must not be supposed that when these changes were authorized they were immediately implemented. The reorganization was carried out at once; but the equipment, even for regular Battalions, was very slow in coming forward. For the Territorial Infantry it remained a mere trickle right up to the opening of hostilities.

Having reorganized the Regular Army in 1936–38 Mr. Hore-Belisha devoted his attention to the Territorials in 1939. Theoretically—although not in practice—the Territorial Army had gone through the same process of reorganization and rearmament as the Regular Army. After the Munich crisis it had become clear that only a miracle could prevent war, and that a considerable increase in the establishment and strength of the Army would be necessary. Mr. Hore-Belisha and his advisers decided to base expansion on the Territorial Army, and to do it by the simple process of doubling it—by the duplication of all T.A. Headquarters and units. The decision to do this was announced in mid-April 1939 and a fortnight later another announcement was made about the government's intention to introduce conscription.

The wisdom of all these measures was generally accepted, although at the time there was much criticism of the methods by which they were implemented.

In World War I we had not started to expand until after hostilities began, and we did not adopt conscription until 1916—two years later. This time we had adopted both measures some months before the outbreak of war. The important influence that this 'flying start' had on our war effort in 1940 and 1941 has never been fully appreciated.

THE TERRITORIAL BATTALIONS and THE DEPOT

In 1933 both the 5th and 8th Battalions had the distinction of being awarded the 'Daily Telegraph Cup', for a 100 per cent attendance at annual camp. This was a fine achievement which shows clearly the spirit of enthusiasm in T.A. Battalions of the Foresters at a time when they were given little official encouragement.

On the 30th October 1935 Sir William Marshall vacated the Colonelcy of the Regiment and was succeeded by Major-General Sir Frederick B. Maurice, K.C.M.G., C.B. The new Colonel had been on General Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien's staff at the Battle of Le Cateau and later became Director of Operations at the War Office. On his retirement from the Army he became a well known military writer and was President of the British Legion from 1932 to 1947.

December 1936 saw a big change in the rôle and organization of the Forester's Territorial Battalions. Some time before it had been decided to increase substantially the number of Home Defence anti-aircraft units, and to make the increase by converting a number of Territorial Infantry Battalions into anti-aircraft artillery and searchlight units.

Two of the four T.A. Battalions of the Foresters—the 6th and The Robin Hoods —were selected for conversion to a searchlight rôle, and on the 10th December 1936 they were redesignated:

40th (The Sherwood Foresters) Anti-Aircraft Bn. Royal Engineers
and
42nd (The Robin Hood) Anti-Aircraft Bn. Royal Engineers.*

Although no longer Infantry these two units retained the Regimental connection as part of their titles, and were to remain within the family of The Sherwood Foresters.

The two unconverted Battalions—the 5th and 8th—joined the 148th Infantry Brigade of the 49th Division, where they were brigaded with the 4th Bn. The Royal Lincolnshire Regiment and the 4th Bn. The Royal Leicestershire Regiment.

With the doubling of the Territorial Army in April 1939 two more Battalions of the Regiment came into being—the 2/5th (Lieut-Colonel H. B. Everard) becoming the second line to the 5th Battalion and the 9th† (Lieut-Colonel C. G. Lancaster) the second line to the 8th Battalion.

The increase in strength, coupled with the decision to reduce Infantry Brigades from four to three Battalions necessitated a further reshuffling of Battalions within Brigades, as follows:

148th Brigade (49th Division)
1/5th‡ and 8th Foresters (together with the 1/5th Bn. The Royal Leicestershire Regiment)

139th Brigade (46th Division—a new Second Line Division)
2/5th and 9th Foresters (together with the 2/5th Bn. The Royal Leicestershire Regiment).

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* Later the designation of the 6th and 7th Battalions was changed again and they became Regiments of the Royal Artillery.

† The 9th Bn. was originally designated 2/8th, but soon after its formation this was changed to 9th Battalion.

‡ Soon after the outbreak of war the 1/5th Foresters left the 148th Brigade and joined the B.E.F. in France as a Lines of Communication Unit (see Chapter 4). Consequently when the 148th Brigade went to Norway in April 1940 it consisted of only two Battalions (see Chapter 5).

The system on which second line Battalions were formed was for their first line Battalions (the 1/5th for the 2/5th and the 8th for the 9th) to provide strong cadres of Officers, N.C.O.s and Specialists as a basis for the new units. It is, however, interesting to record that some 85 per cent of the Officers, N.C.O.s and men of the 9th Foresters were miners and came from one firm—B. A. Collieries Ltd. of Nottingham.

Two second line Battalions of the Foresters were more fortunate than many newly formed Territorial units, in that they had a good opportunity to 'shake down' at the 139th Infantry Brigade camp in Anglesey in July—only a few weeks before war was declared.

Following an ultimatum, to which no reply was received, the British Government declared war on Germany at 11 a.m. on the 3rd September. A similar declaration was made by the French Government a few hours later and in a short time they were joined by the other countries of the British Commonwealth.

The several Battalions and the Regimental Depot of the Foresters completed their mobilization and set about their war duties. In the course of the next six years they were to visit many lands and play their part in many bloody battles.

Statement of the Successes of the Regular Battalions and Regimental Depot, The Sherwood Foresters at Shooting and Sport During the Period between the Wars—1919 to 1939

Note: Unless otherwise stated the competitions mentioned were won by the unit of the Regiment concerned.

Year	1st Battalion	2nd Battalion	Depot
1920		Sultans Football Cup Egyptian Exped. Force Hockey Cup Alexandria Football League and Robert Hughes Football Cup	
1921		Alexandria Knockout Cup and Egyptian Exped. Force Cricket Cup Alexandria Football League and Robert Hughes Football Cup	Northern Comd. Recruits Football Cup
1921–22		Egyptian Exped. Force Football Cup	
1922	Aldershot Comd. Knockout Football Cup (Junior)	Abbasia Knockout Football Cup	Derby Wednesday League (Football) Derby Wednesday Cup (Football)
1924		Northern Comd. (India) James Lee Cricket Cup	

Note: Unless otherwise stated the competitions mentioned were won by the unit of the Regiment concerned.

Year	1st Battalion	2nd Battalion	Depot
1925		Durand, Murree Brewery, Rawlpindi Dist., Lahore Trades, Viceroys and Simla Football Cups Rawalpindi Dist. Boxing Shield	Derby Wednesday Cup (Football)
1926	Northern Ireland Dist. Hockey Cup Young Soldiers Cup for shooting (Pte. Sandall)	Indian Football Assoc. Shield Rawalpindi Dist. Football Cup Northern Command and Rawalpindi Dist. Boxing Shield	
1927	*Northern Ireland Dist. Small Arms Meeting:* Coy. Challenge Cup (C Coy) Lewis Gun Match, W.O.s and Sergts. (L/Sgt. J. Eldred) Young Soldiers Cup (Pte. F. E. Brown) North-West Football League, Northern Ireland A.R.A. Meeting Bisley Class B. Worcestershire Cup Match (Cpl. S. Davis and Cpl. D. Andrews) Bronze Medal Tournament winners	Indian Football Assoc. Shield Murree Brewery Football Cup	
1928	Northern Ireland Dist. Small Arms Meeting: The Curragh Cup North Ireland Army Football Cup North West Ireland Charity Cup (Football) North-West Ireland Football League North Ireland Dist. Bronze Medal Tournament Bayonet Fencing Championship	Winner, Welter Weight Amateur Championship Bombay Presidency (Pte. Goode) Murree Brewery Football Cup Durand Cup (football)	
1929	Folkestone Senior Football League Eastern Comd. Individual Foil (L/Cpl. Griffiths) A.R.A. Meeting—Company Shield (B Coy) A.R.A. Meeting—Hopton Cup (B Coy)	Murree Brewery Football Cup All India Amateur Welter Weight Boxing (Pte. Goode) Humphrey Rowing Cup (Karachi)	
1930	Individual Epee (Cpl. Griffiths) Folkestone Senior Football League Dover Charity Cup (football) Army Football Assoc. Cup		

Note: Unless otherwise stated the competitions mentioned were won by the unit of the Regiment concerned.

Year	1st Battalion	2nd Battalion	Depot
1931	Army Football Assoc. Cup Dover Charity Cup (football) Folkestone Senior Football League Hythe Charity Football Cup Winners Army Inter-Unit Fencing Championship Eastern Comd. Bronze Medal Tournament for Fencing (Other ranks) sabre—Cpl. A. Griffiths	Lahore Dist. Athletic Sports Cup	Northern Comd. Recruits Football Cup
1932	Runners-up Army Inter-Unit Team Fencing Championship Northern Comd. Small Arms Meeting, W.O.s and Sgts. Team Match Army Football Assoc. Cup	Lahore Dist. Athletic Sports Cup.	Sandhurst Cup Derby Wednesday League Championship (football)
1933	Runners-up Army Inter-Unit Team Fencing Championship	Punjab Commission Cricket Cup The Omega Hockey Bowl	Derby and District Wednesday League Cup (football)
1934	Northern Comd. Bronze Medal Fencing Championship Northern Comd. Bayonet Team Combat	The Rovers Cup (football—all India)	Derby Wednesday League Medals (football)
1935	Northern Comd. Bronze Medal Fencing Championship Runners-up Army Inter-Unit Team Fencing Championship		Derby Wednesday League Championship (football)
1936	Jamaica All Island Championship (football)		Derby Wednesday League Championship (football) Derby Wednesday League Cup (football)
1936–37			Northern Comd. Other Ranks Foil, Sabre, Epee and Bayonet (Cpl. A. Griffiths)
1938	Jamaica Comd. Rifle Championship (Pte. Stevenson) Jamaica Senior Football Cup Jamaica Junior Football Cup Jamaica Championship Football League		
1939	Haifa and Dist. Football Cup		

CHAPTER 3

THE SHERWOOD FORESTERS IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939 to 1945

A General Survey

The events which led up to World War II have been described in the previous chapter. This chapter is devoted to a brief survey of the war as a whole, in relation to the activities of the Sherwood Foresters. It is felt that there are advantages in giving the reader a general picture before he starts on the detailed story of the various Battalions of the Regiment.

Viewed from the British angle the war of 1939–45 may be divided into six main phases—approximately consecutive, but not entirely so, as in a few instances they overlap:

I. *The 'Phoney War' and Dunkirk*—September 1939 to June 1940.

II. *The Battle of Britain*—June 1940 to 1943.

III. *The Entry into the War of Russia, Japan and the U.S.A.*—defeats followed by the build-up for victory.

IV. *The conquest of Africa*—El Alamein and Tunisia.

V. *The Invasion of Italy.*

VI. *The Invasion of North-West Europe and the Liberation of Burma*—followed by victory in both Europe and Asia.

One or more Battalions of the Foresters played a part in each of these phases; but before attempting to fit them into their place in the world scene it will be as well to give a few particulars of each.

In all there were twenty Units of the Regiment separately designated during the 1939–45 war; but owing to renumberings, amalgamations and disbandments there were never more than fourteen in existence at any one time. Not all were Infantry, however, some being in the guise of Armoured Regiments and Anti-Aircraft Regiments.

The following statement is designed to show at a glance the numbering, designation and rôle of Units of the Regiment in World War II:

Battalion	Changes in numbering (if any)	Changes in designation (if any)	Rôle
1st	After capture at Tobruk in June 1942 was reformed from 16th Bn. in Jan. 1943	—	Infantry
2nd	—	—	Infantry
1/5th	—	—	Infantry
2/5th 5th	The 1/5th was captured at Singapore in Feb. 1942 and was not resuscitated. As a result the 2/5th was renumbered 5th in Jan. 1943	—	Infantry
6th	—	40th (The Sherwood Foresters) Anti-Aircraft Bn. Royal Engineers, re-designated Aug. 1940 40 S.L. Regt. R.A., and again in June 1943 '149th Light A.A. Regt. R.A.'	Anti-Aircraft
The Robin Hoods	—	42nd (The Robin Hoods' Sherwood Foresters) Anti-Aircraft Bn. Royal Engineers re-designated Aug. 1940 42 S.L. Regt. R.A.	Anti-Aircraft
8th	—	—	Infantry
9th	—	Became '112th Regiment R.A.C.' in Nov. 1941.	Infantry Armour
*10th 30th	The 10th became the 30th Bn. in June 1942	—	Infantry
12th	—	—	Infantry
13th	—	Became '163rd Regiment R.A.C.' in July 1942, but reverted to Infantry again in Dec. 1943	Infantry Armour Infantry
15th	Disbanded in Aug. 1941	—	Infantry
50th 14th	The 50th became the 14th Bn. in Oct. 1940	—	Infantry
70th 16th 1st	The 70th became the 16th Bn. in Sept. 1942, which in turn became the resuscitated 1st Bn. in Jan. 1943	—	Infantry

*** A 2/10 Bn. was formed in September 1940 for Home Defence, but it was disbanded after a few weeks and, apart from this reference, is not mentioned in this history.**

Of these Battalions nine (1st, 2nd, 1/5th, 2/5th (5th), 6th, The Robin Hoods, 8th, 9th and 14th) took part in active operations in an overseas theatre of war at some period during 1939–45; two Battalions (12th and 13th) went to India in 1942 as part of the garrison there and the remaining three (10th (30th), 15th and 70th (16th)) served at home.

Battalions of the Foresters served at Dunkirk, in Norway, North Africa and the Middle East, Italy, Greece, Singapore, Iraq, Palestine, Syria and North-West Europe (1944–45). The only major theatre of operations in which they were not represented was Burma.

On the outbreak of war, on 3rd September 1939, the Battalions of the Regiment existing at that time were located as follows:

1st Bn.	Haifa, Palestine
2nd Bn.	Bordon
1/5th Bn.	Derby area
2/5th Bn.	Derby area
6th Bn. (40th (Sherwood Foresters) Anti-Aircraft Bn. Royal Engineers)	Chesterfield area
*7th Bn. (42nd (Sherwood Foresters) Anti-Aircraft Bn. Royal Engineers)	Nottingham area
8th Bn.	Newark area
9th Bn.	Newark area

The remaining Battalions (10th (30th), 12th, 13th, 15th, 50th (14th) and 70th (16th)) were formed during the war.

On mobilization the Regimental Depot expanded and changed its name to 'Infantry Training Centre' (I.T.C.); but remained at Normanton Barracks, Derby, until August 1941 when it became 'No. 7 Infantry Training Centre' and moved to Lincoln.

On completion of mobilization the British Expeditionary Force (B.E.F.), under General The Viscount Gort, proceeded to France in support of the French Armies. The force at first consisted of four Divisions (1st, 3rd, 4th and 5th) and was organized in two Corps with Corps and Army troops. After concentrating in the Le Mans area, the B.E.F. moved forward to the traditional position on the left of the main body of the French Armies—along the Franco-Belgian frontier east of Lille, with G.H.Q. in the Arras area.

The 2nd Bn. The Sherwood Foresters accompanied the original B.E.F. as part of the 3rd Infantry Brigade of the 1st Division and was the first Battalion of the Regiment to enter a theatre of operations in World War II.

The tranquil conditions of the winter of 1939–40, known as the 'Phoney War', resulted in the decision to send three second line Territorial Army divisions, and a few independent units, out from home to complete their training in France and assist in airfield construction and work on the Lines of Communication.

In accordance with this policy the *1/5th (Lines of Communication Troops), 2/5th (139th Brigade, 46th Division), and 9th (139th Brigade, 46th Division) Battalions* joined the B.E.F. during the winter, and when active operations began on the 10th May 1940 these three Battalions and the *2nd Battalion* were to participate in the three weeks' campaign, which ended with the evacuation of the bulk of the B.E.F. from Dunkirk.

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* Known familiarly, and referred to in this book, as 'The Robin Hoods'.

In April 1940—a month before active operations began in North-West Europe—the Germans had occupied Norway and Denmark. In an unsuccessful attempt to counter this move the British and French Governments landed troops at various places on the Norwegian coast, and the *8th Battalion (148th Brigade)* took part in this short campaign, and eventually re-embarked with the rest of the Army units. Although the 2nd Battalion was engaged in patrolling while in the French sector of the Maginot Line during the winter of 1939–40, it is true to say that the *8th Battalion was the first unit of the Regiment to engage the enemy, as a unit, in World War II.*

After the fall of France in mid-June 1940 the British Empire and Commonwealth remained alone in arms against Germany and Italy (who entered the war on the 10th June 1940) for a period of a year. During this time our main preoccupation was the defence of the United Kingdom against invasion, although our forces in the Middle East, under General Wavell, conducted vigorous offensive operations against the Italians in Africa. During the period of the Battle of Britain the *2nd, 1/5th, 2/5th, 6th, The Robin Hoods, 8th, 9th, 10th (30th), 12th, 13th, 15th, 50th (14th) and 70th (16th) Battalions* all served in the United Kingdom. Only the *1st Battalion* was abroad, in the Middle East, during the year of our single-handed struggle.

In June 1941 the Germans, in spite of a non-aggression pact signed in August 1939, attacked Russia. Six months later, on the 7th December 1941, Japan attacked the United States Naval Base at Pearl Harbour, and followed this by attacking all American, British and Dutch possessions in the Far East and Pacific. Thus Britain, after fighting alone for over a year, found allied to her in arms the two great powers of the East and West. It seemed that victory in the end was now almost certain, although the path was to be a long and difficult one. The German armies penetrated deep into Russia, killing and capturing immense numbers of Russians. By October 1941 Riga, Smolensk and Kiev had fallen, Leningrad was besieged and Moscow threatened. In the East we, and our friends, fared even worse. Within a few months America, Britain and Holland had been stripped of all their Far Eastern and Pacific possessions; Japan had gained Naval and Air superiority in the area and her Armies, advancing through Burma, were at the gates of India. In these affairs the Foresters were represented by the *1/5 Battalion which went to Singapore early in 1942 with the 18th Division.* By the time of its arrival, however, the campaign was all but lost, and it was involved in the general surrender of our forces which occurred on the 15th February 1942.

The first half of 1942 was a bad period for the Commonwealth in North Africa. In the spring and summer of that year German and Italian forces under General

Erwin Rommel carried out a counter-offensive to the frontiers of Egypt. In June Tobruk fell and the *1st Battalion*—which had been in the Middle East since the beginning of the war—participated in the general surrender of Commonwealth forces defending the port. (The *1st Battalion* was resuscitated in January 1943, being re-formed at home from the *16th Battalion.*)

Soon, however, the tide turned. In October the Battle of El Alamein took place and by January 1943 the Eighth Army under General Montgomery had reached Tripoli and inflicted a crushing defeat on the German-Italian forces. Meanwhile the Allies had carried out their first large-scale amphibious operation, when American, British and Free French forces landed in North-West Africa early in November 1942. In this phase of the war the *14th Battalion* served with distinction in the Eighth Army at El Alamein, later going to Iraq and Syria and thence to Italy. The *2nd and 2/5th (5th) Battalions*, as part of the First Army, took part in the Tunisian campaign and later the *2nd Battalion* formed part of the force which occupied the Italian Island of Pantelleria.

The next stage was the Invasion of Sicily and Italy. In Italy the Foresters were represented by the *2nd, 5th and 14th Battalions.*

July 1943 saw the fall of Mussolini, and in September a military armistice between the Allies and Italy was signed. This event had little influence on operations. The Italians had already ceased to take any serious part in the fighting and their defection from the Axis encouraged the Germans to make more vigorous efforts.

While these events had been taking place in the Mediterranean there had been a marked change in outlook at home. The Royal Air Force had greatly reduced the strength and offensive spirit of the Luftwaffe, and the threat of invasion had declined. In August 1943 American and Commonwealth leaders, meeting at the Quebec Conference, set the seal to an Allied cross-Channel invasion ('Operation Overlord') of North-West Europe, to take place in the first half of 1944. From that date onwards in the United Kingdom—where increasing numbers of American troops were assembling—the emphasis was on preparations for this great undertaking. With the appointment of General Eisenhower as Supreme Commander, and General Montgomery as Commander 21st Army Group, training became more specialized, each formation and unit preparing, and often rehearsing, for the particular rôle assigned to it in the invasion plan.

By the summer of 1943 a great change had also come about on the Eastern European front, where the German forces had shot their bolt and the Russian Armies had passed to the offensive.

The great assault on North-West Europe began on the 6th June 1944 and was to end on the Baltic less than a year later. The Foresters were not destined to feature in their traditional Infantry rôle in this campaign. They were, however, represented by the *6th Battalion and The Robin Hoods—both in an Anti-aircraft rôle*. The *6th Battalion* was employed for a time containing the enemy garrison in Dunkirk; *The*

Robin Hoods played a worthy part in the air defence of Brussels and both units were deployed for the crossing of the Rhine.

Towards the end of 1944 the Greeks, having forced the Germans to withdraw from their country, fell to fighting among themselves in the customary manner of Balkan countries. The British Government, therefore, decided to send a force to restore order, check the spread of Communism and re-establish the King and the rightful Government of the country. The *5th Battalion* formed part of this force.

As the war progressed, and our manpower problems became more difficult, many units were disbanded or placed in suspended animation—the latter term implying that disbandment was only temporary, although in some cases it proved to be permanent.

Among these disbanded units were the *9th (October 1944), 14th (December 1944) and 30th (December 1942) Battalions of the Foresters.*

On the 7th May 1945 all German forces surrendered to the Allies and three months later, on the 14th August 1945, the Japanese also capitulated.

When hostilities ceased the surviving Battalions of the Foresters were located as follows:

Europe and the Middle East—7th May 1945

1st Bn.	United Kingdom
2nd Bn.	Palestine
5th Bn.	Italy (having just arrived from Greece)
6th Bn. (Reorganized as Infantry)	Germany
The Robin Hoods (42 S.L. Regt. R.A.)	Germany
8th Bn.	United Kingdom

India and the Far East—14th August 1945

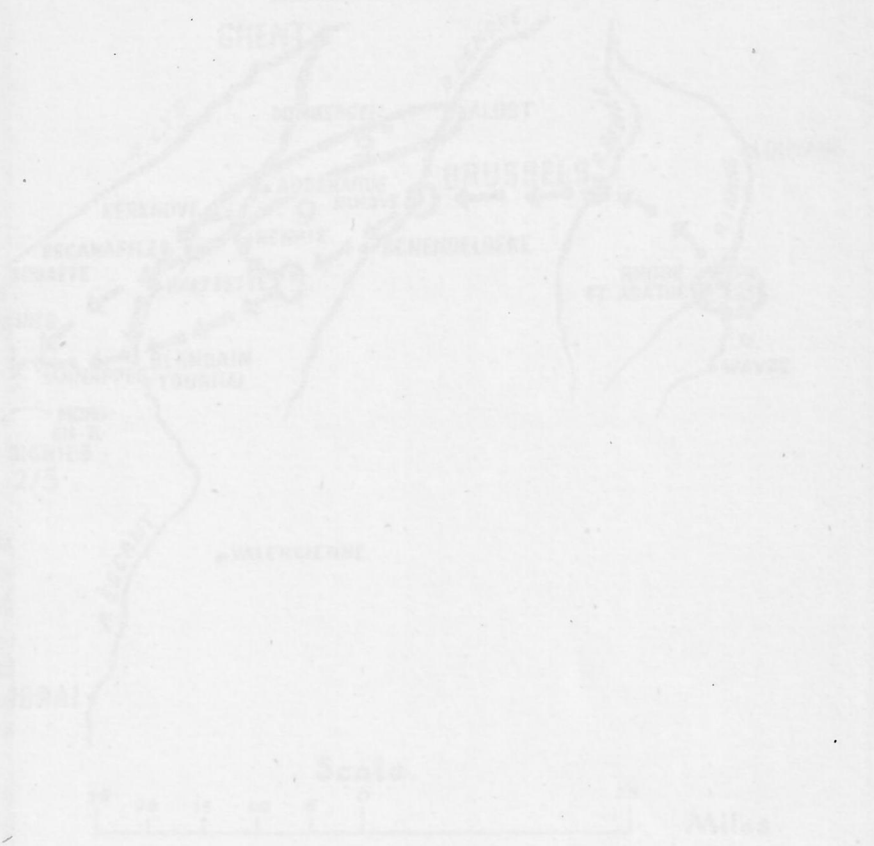
12th Bn.	India
13th Bn.	India

Compared with many other Regiments the Sherwood Foresters had an unusual war. They greatly distinguished themselves at Dunkirk. Later, and within a few months of each other, two Battalions of the Regiment—the 1/5th at Singapore and the 1st at Tobruk—were forced to surrender and went into captivity. In both cases their surrender was the result of a direct order from higher authority and part of the general capitulation of a large force. The 6th Battalion and The Robin Hoods—in an Anti-aircraft rôle—accompanied the British Liberating Armies to North-West Europe in 1944. No unit of the Regiment fought in Burma. The main effort of the Foresters in World War II was in the Mediterranean and Middle East theatre of operations, where four of their Battalions (1st, 2nd, 2/5th (5th) and 14th) fought in the liberation of Africa and the conquest of Italy and helped in the pacification of Iraq, Palestine, Syria and Greece.

This is the general background to the story of the Foresters in World War II, whose activities are described in greater detail in the chapters which follow.

S 2nd, 1/5th, 2/5th and 9th Battalions
ONS west of the SOMME

SKETCH MAP No. 1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Scale
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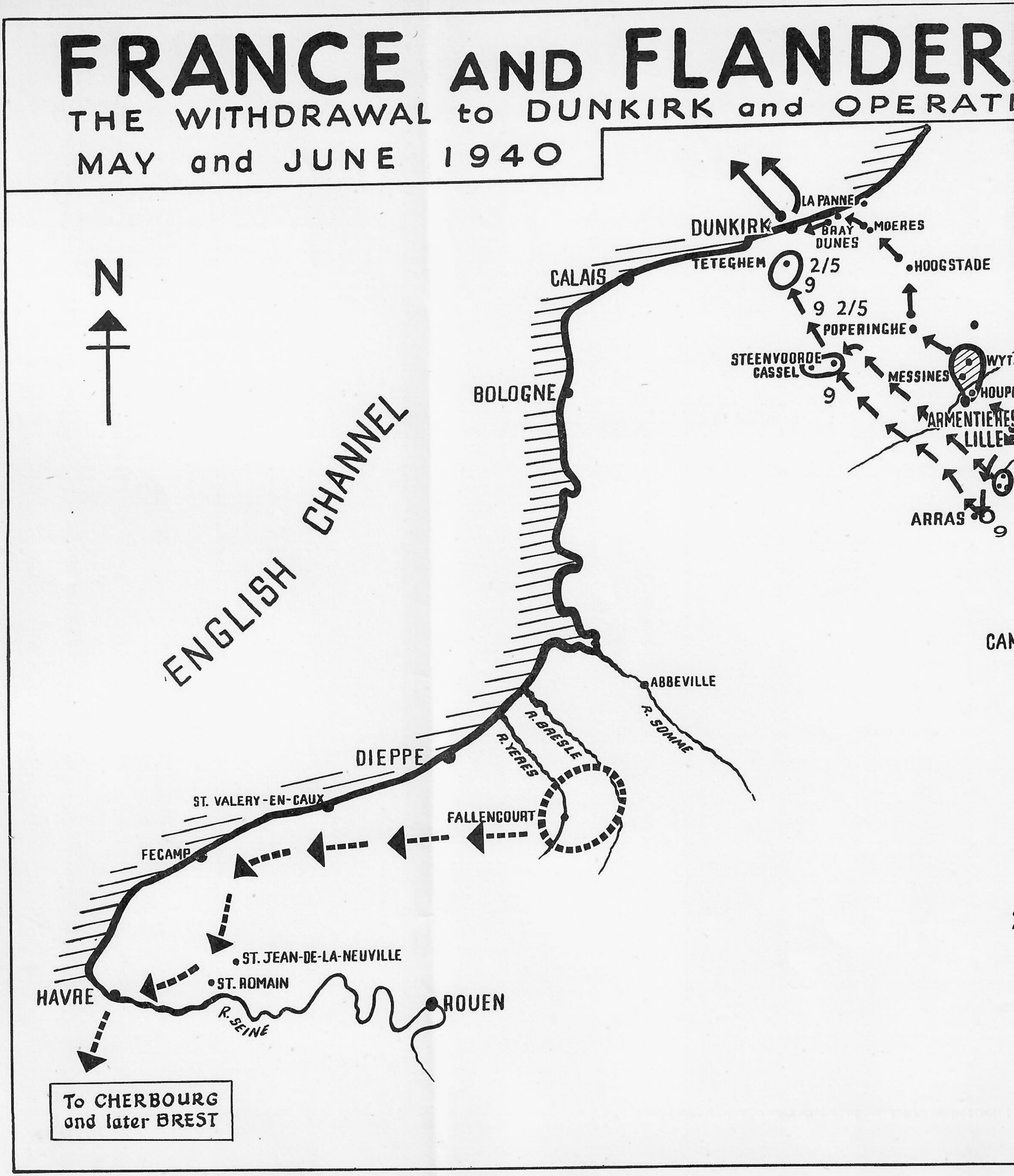
Key.

◎	Combat Areas	2nd Battalion
←• ←•	Route of Withdrawal	
2/5 ○ 9 ○	Combat Areas	2/5th and 9th Battalions
← ←	Route of Withdrawal	
⁘	Area in which defensive operations were conducted	1/5th Battalion
←•••••	Route of Withdrawal	



FRANCE AND FLANDER

THE WITHDRAWAL to DUNKIRK and OPERATI

MAY and JUNE 1940

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ABBEVILLE
R. SOMME
R. BRESLE
R. YERES
DIEPPE
ST. VALERY-EN-CAUX
FALLENCOURT
FECAMP
ST. JEAN-DE-LA-NEUVILLE
ST. ROMAIN
HAVRE
ROUEN
R. SEINE
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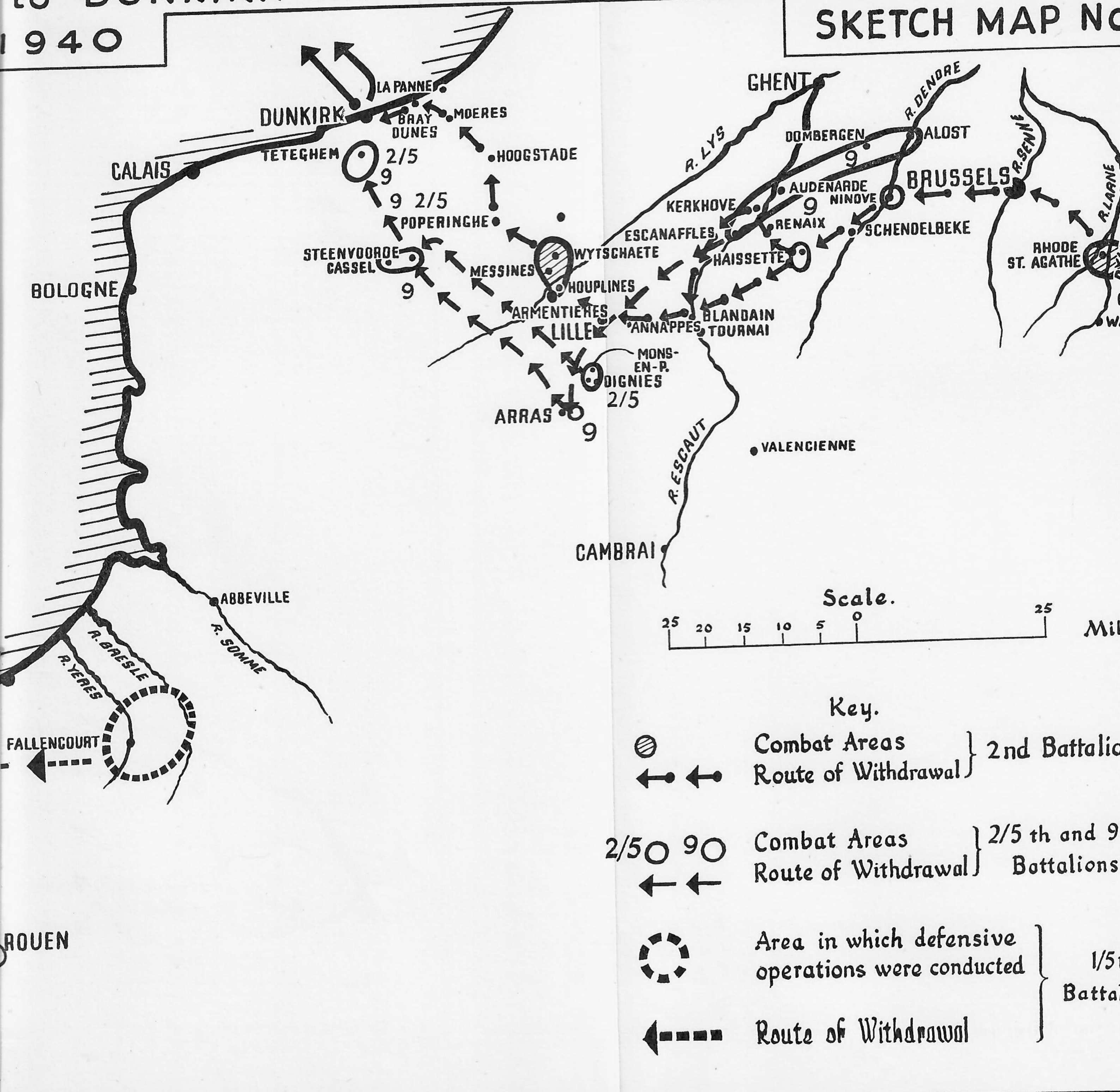
AND FLANDERS (2nd, 1/5th, 2/5th and 9th Batta

to DUNKIRK and OPERATIONS west of the SOMM

1940

SKETCH MAP No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HAISSETTE
RHODE ST. AGATHE
R. ESCAUT
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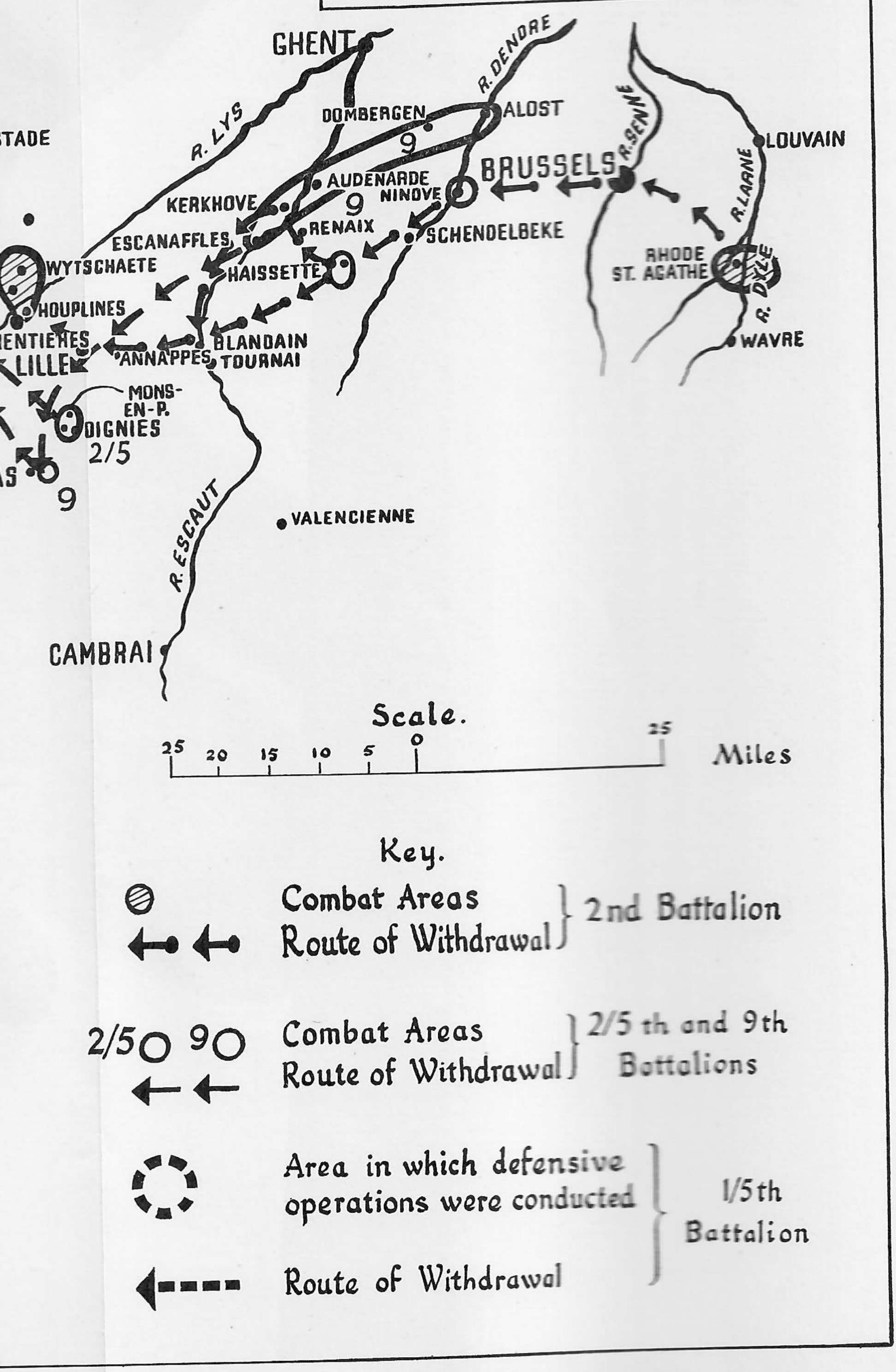
RS (2nd, 1/5th, 2/5th and 9th Battalion)

ATIONS west of the SOMME

SKETCH MAP No. I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HAISSETTE
RHODE
ST. AGATHE
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Miles
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Combat Areas
Route of Withdrawal
2nd Battalion
2/5
9
Combat Areas
Route of Withdrawal
2/5 th and 9th Battalions
Area in which defensive operations were conducted
Route of Withdrawal
1/5th Battalion

CHAPTER 4

THE 'PHONEY WAR' AND DUNKIRK

September 1939 to June 1940

(See Sketch Map I)

Four Battalions of the Sherwood Foresters served with the B.E.F. in France and Belgium in 1939–40, namely:

2nd Battalion (3rd Brigade, 1st Division)
1/5th Battalion (Lines of Communication Troops)
2/5th Battalion } (139th Brigade, 46th Division)
9th Battalion }

The 2nd Battalion was part of the original force which arrived in France in September and October 1939. The other Battalions joined the B.E.F. during the winter of 1939–40 and spring of 1940 when the decision was made to send three Territorial Army divisions, and a few independent units, to France to complete their training, work on airfield construction and perform duties on the Lines of Communication. These Divisions had no artillery, or other heavy equipment, and units were armed with little more than rifles and a few light automatics. Their transport was on a very modest scale.

For the first eight months of hostilities there was practically no fighting in Europe. On the Southern part of the front, where their frontiers were contiguous, the French and German troops faced each other in the 'Maginot Line' and 'Western Wall' respectively, the fighting being confined to occasional patrol clashes and artillery exchanges. To the North the B.E.F. and the French Armies of the North were separated from the enemy by the strictly neutral states of Belgium and Holland. This period of activity, which lasted until the 10th May 1940, became known as the 'Phoney War'.

The Allied plan was a purely defensive one. There was no thought of assuming the offensive at the outbreak of hostilities in order to relieve pressure on the Poles, whose country was being invaded by the Germans. During the winter various plans were made for dealing with an enemy offensive through Belgium or Holland, or both. The one finally decided upon was known as 'Plan D', in which the B.E.F. and the French Armies of the North were to advance into Belgium and take up defensive positions East of, and covering, Brussels.

This is the general setting in which the four Forester Battalions served in France during the winter of 1939–40 and spring of 1940.

I. THE 'PHONEY WAR' (SEPTEMBER 1939 to MAY 1940)

2nd Battalion

On the same day as hostilities began—3rd September 1939—the 2nd Bn. The Sherwood Foresters, under the command of Lieut-Colonel G. M. Gamble, completed its mobilization at Bordon, near Aldershot. The Battalion was in the 3rd Brigade (Brigadier H. O. Curtis—later Brigadier T. N. F. Wilson) of the 1st Division (Major-General The Hon. H. R. L. G. Alexander), the other Battalions in the Brigade being the 1st Bn. The Duke of Wellington's Regiment and the 1st Bn. The King's Shropshire Light Infantry.

The next three weeks were spent in 'settling in' the reservists and giving them some training in new weapons and equipment, with which many were unfamiliar, and in preparing the Battalion for a move overseas.

The 95th sailed from Southampton on the two cross-Channel steamers S.S. *Biarritz* and S.S. *Paris* on the 26th September and disembarked at Cherbourg the following day. After a short stay in the vicinity of the port they moved by rail to Sille-le-Guillaume and then marched some thirteen miles to billets at the two villages of Torcé and Viviers. A few days later another move was made through Rouen and Abbeville to Beaurains, near Arras. Only four days were spent there, the Battalion then moving to Louvil, near the Belgian frontier, where it remained for the first part of the winter, partly in the village and partly in surrounding farm buildings.

At Louvil the 2nd Foresters spent their time constructing defences along the Franco-Belgian frontier (an extension of the 'Maginot Line' which became known as the 'Gort Line') and in training.

At the end of November it was announced that the 3rd Brigade was to move South into the French sector to take over a portion of the Maginot Line. This was the beginning of an arrangement whereby British Brigades (later increased to Divisions) in turn held a sector in contact with the enemy in order to obtain battle experience. As it turned out the experience of static conditions in the Maginot Line was of little value in the highly mobile campaign which was to follow in a few months' time.

The move south lay through Cambrai, St. Quentin, Laon and Rheims (where a night was spent), Vitry and Bar-le-Duc to Metz, where the British troops were received with great enthusiasm. Two days were spent in a French artillery barracks on the outskirts of Metz and then the Battalion made a 40-mile move by train, lorry and march route to the Maginot Line, arriving at the deserted villages of St. Francois-la-Croix and Rodlach on the morning of the 3rd December. The take-over from the French was uneventful, the Brigade being disposed with the 1st Duke of Wellingtons forward in the *Ligne de Contact*, the 2nd Foresters in the *Ligne* *de Receuil* (second or support line) and the 1st K.S.L.I. in the main position or *Ligne de Resistance*. Activity in the Maginot Line was limited to artillery exchanges—never very heavy, but occurring almost daily—and to patrolling in which rival patrols sometimes met and ambushes occasionally took place.

On the 9th December, whilst in the *Ligne de Receuil* the 2nd Foresters were visited by His Majesty King George VI accompanied by the Duke of Gloucester, Lord Gort and an imposing array of French Generals. The Battalion also provided a Guard of Honour for His Majesty at Brigade Headquarters.

During the period 12th to 17th December the Battalion held a sector of the front line around Waldwiestroff, where they experienced some shelling and carried out extensive patrolling. They had no casualties whilst in the Maginot Line. Their five-day tour in the *Ligne de Contact* was followed by a lorry move back to the Artillery Barracks near Metz. On the 19th they entrained for the return journey to the Belgian frontier, where they spent the first Christmas of the war in their old area between Templeuve and Louvil. In the new year morale was given a tonic by the opening of home leave.

Early in February the Battalion moved slightly to the right in the Bachy sector. In March they went back to an area near Amiens for a week's collective training, returning to Bachy on its completion.

In April the Germans invaded Denmark and Norway,* and this tended to confirm the accuracy of reports that an enemy attack in the West, probably involving violation of Belgian and Dutch neutrality, was imminent.

When on the 10th May 1940 the blow fell the 2nd Bn. The Sherwood Foresters were ready, with a proper undersanding of the part they were to play in Plan D.

1/5th, 2/5th and 9th Battalions

These three Territorial Battalions were all embodied at their peace stations in the early days of September 1939.

The first to join the B.E.F. was the 1/5th Battalion (under the command of Lieut-Colonel H. H. Lilly) which, after a period of training in the Derby area, moved to Aldershot for further training and then proceeded to France, disembarking at Cherbourg on the 18th November 1939. Five days later they moved to Nozay as Lines of Communication Troops.

The 2/5th Battalion (Lieut-Colonel H. B. Everard) and the 9th Battalion (Lieut-Colonel C. G. Lancaster) had both been embodied in the 139th Brigade of the 46th (Midland) Division. After eight months of training and guard duties in England the Division went to France at the end of April 1940 to complete its training and for employment on airfield construction. The Division was neither trained nor equipped for active operations; but, as we shall see, it was destined within a few weeks to participate in the gruelling campaign which began on the 10th May.

The 2/5th and 9th Foresters disembarked at Cherbourg on the 27th April 1940.

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* See Chapter 5.

II. THE ADVANCE INTO BELGIUM AND THE WITHDRAWAL TO DUNKIRK (MAY 1940)

With the successful conclusion of the Polish campaign the Germans had begun concentrating their forces in the West during the early winter of 1939–40. This concentration increased in strength as formations became equipped and trained. By May 1940 they had available for employment in the West 105 Divisions (of which 10 were Armoured, or Panzer, Divisions) against a combined British-French strength of 103 Divisions, plus 26 Belgian and 10 Dutch should these two countries become involved.

On the 10th May the blow fell when, in the early hours of the morning, German troops crossed into Belgium and Holland.

At this time the four Battalions of the Sherwood Foresters serving in the B.E.F. were located as follows:

2nd Battalion	Bachy
1/5th Battalion .	Nozay
2/5th Battalion . .	Rennes area
9th Battalion	St Thurial

2nd Battalion

Immediately the news of the German invasion became known the 2nd Foresters were placed at six hours' notice to move and soon after 4 a.m. on the 11th the Battalion, as vanguard of the 1st Division, crossed the frontier into Belgium en route for its objective on the Dyle.

At that time the key appointments in the Battalion were as follows:

Commanding Officer . .	Lieut-Colonel G. M. Gamble
2nd-in-Command . . .	Major J. E. Wright
Adjutant	Captain W. P. Allsebrook
Quartermaster	Captain W. H. Barber

Company Commanders:

A	Major R. E. H. Stott
B	Captain H. F. Meynell
C	Major C. R. T. Wilmot
D	Major N. S. Temple
HQ	Captain J. H. M. Hackett

The Battalion debussed in Brussels at 1 p.m. (11th May), receiving a great welcome from the inhabitants. They then marched to billets at Watermael-Boitsfort just East of the city. En route the rear of the column was bombed and machine-gunned by enemy aircraft, but there were no casualties.

Soon after midnight (11/12th May) the Foresters took over positions about Neerysche from the 13/18th Hussars, who then moved forward with a view to making contact with the enemy. These positions, which were slightly east of the Dyle, were occupied by about 6 a.m., and the Battalion began to dig in. That evening at about

9 p.m. they were relieved by troops of the 2nd Brigade, and withdrew to the line of the Dyle where they were in Brigade reserve. Digging continued throughout the 14th, and the Battalion took up its battle positions when the 13/18th Hussars withdrew through the infantry and reported that they had made contact with enemy advanced troops who were not very far distant.

There now occurred a series of local moves occasioned by the withdrawal of the left of the First French Army located to the South of Wavre. The right flank of the B.E.F. conformed to this move by withdrawing South of Rhode St. Agathe to the line of the River Lasne.

At 2 p.m. on the 15th the Battalion moved from its positions to extend the right of the Brigade front, by taking over the sector held by the 1st Royal Welch Fusiliers (6th Brigade of the 2nd Division) North of Ottenbourg. The relief was delayed by heavy enemy mortar fire and before it took place new orders were received for the Battalion to move to the River Lasne, where about midnight (15/16th) the three Battalions of the 3rd Brigade took up defensive positions along the line of the river. Here they remained for most of the 16th under heavy mortar and machine-gun fire.

On other parts of the front a gloomy picture was unfolding. Their frontier defences pierced, and their cities assaulted from the skies, the Dutch were quickly overwhelmed and on the 14th May laid down their arms. Holland had been conquered in five days.

From the South came disquieting news from the Ninth French Army. Here the Germans, advancing through the supposedly impenetrable Ardennes, had crossed the Meuse near Sedan and on the 14th May began the great armoured drive which was to take them to the Channel ports in less than a fortnight and result in the evacuation of the B.E.F. from Dunkirk.

By the 16th the decision to withdraw the Allied forces from Belgium had been made and at 9.30 p.m. on that day the Foresters left their positions on the Lasne and marched back to some woods East of Brussels and near Watermael-Boitsfort, where they had debussed only three days before. During the withdrawal Captain A. Forester Fielding, the second-in-command of D Company, remained behind to extricate a section which was in difficulties; but they did not rejoin and he and eight other ranks were reported missing.

Early on the 17th the Battalion continued its march West moving through Brussels and arriving at the River Senne about Leeuw St. Pierre at 4 p.m. The stay here was a short one and at midnight (17/18th) they were on the move again, to a rearguard position East of Ninove. By 5.30 a.m. they had taken up positions East of Ninove with A Company right, B left and D Company in reserve. C Company held a secondary position guarding the entry to Ninove. The enemy did not make contact and at 9 a.m. the withdrawal continued to the River Dendre. The Battalion arrived at the river, near Schendelbeke, at about 1.30 p.m. and took up defensive positions.

The move West began again on the 19th at 10.15 a.m., the destination being Blandain on the River Escaut. En route, at about 2 p.m., an intermediate position about Haissette was occupied. Up to this point the Foresters' withdrawal had not been very heavily pressed by the enemy; but they had marched some 50 miles as the aircraft flies (and many more as the man walks) in three days, with only the briefest spells for food and rest. Much of the time when the Battalion was nominally halted was spent in digging, sentry duty and patrolling. Very soon after the occupation of the Haissette defences it became apparent that the enemy was closing in round the position at strength. During the withdrawal 10 officers and about 290 men, under Major N. S. Temple, were cut off and only succeeded in extricating themselves by carrying out an exhausting march through Renaix and Kerkhove, where for a short time they operated as a detached unit of the 11th Brigade of the 4th Division. During the march to Kerkhove the Adjutant rode on ahead on a commandeered civilian motor-cycle in order to prevent the premature destruction of a bridge by our own Sappers. He arrived twenty minutes before it was due to go up and succeeded in persuading the demolition party to delay destruction until the Forester party had crossed. This was not done without difficulty. There had been many reports of 'fifth columnists', of Germans dressed in British uniform speaking perfect English and similar incidents. They were mostly untrue, but nerves were on edge and the demolition party at this bridge took a lot of convincing that the Adjutant (on his civilian motor bicycle) was a genuine British officer.

A somewhat amusing incident occurred at Haissette. There the Burgomaster, in his best clothes and wearing the emblems of his office, turned out in the square to surrender the town, thinking that the Foresters were Germans. He is reported to have been somewhat roughly handled, but no doubt this was a useful rehearsal for the real thing which must have taken place shortly afterwards, as the enemy was not far behind Major Temple and his party.

While these events were taking place Battalion Headquarters, and the troops remaining with it, had been formed into a composite company. However, at about 9 p.m. on the 20th Major Temple—who had secured some vehicles—arrived with his party at Battalion Headquarters. The Battalion then reorganized and on the 21st moved forward to occupy the original positions allotted to it at Blandain.

About this time the decision was made to evacuate the B.E.F. and as many French troops as possible, from Dunkirk. Although this information was not communicated to the troops until some days later, it soon became known to lower formation and unit commanders, and all future moves were planned with this end in view.

At about 10 p.m. on the 22nd May the 2nd Foresters withdrew to some prepared positions around Annappes. There they remained until the night of the 26th. On one of the two patrols led by Captain J. H. M. Hackett a few enemy scouts were seen, but otherwise no contact with the enemy was made during the stay in this position.

On the night of the 26/27th the Battalion marched to Houplines—a well known place-name in World War I—where they took up positions on the River Lys covering the bridges. At 4 p.m. they came under orders of the 13th Infantry

Brigade (Brigadier M. C. Dempsey) of the 5th Division (Major-General H. E. Franklyn), and were ordered to move to billets about one mile South of Messines.

(The next 24 hours was a period of much confusion, and accounts differ as to the exact sequence of events. Casualties were heavy, officers and men were very exhausted and the War Diary for the period is incomplete. From the numerous sources consulted it seems that the account which follows is substantially correct.)

On the morning of the 28th Brigadier Dempsey met the Commanding Officer and Adjutant at a place some distance from where the Battalion was located, and gave instruction for them to move forward to fill a dangerous gap in the Brigade line along the Wambeek stream between the 2nd Wiltshires (left) and 143rd Brigade (right). Before these orders were properly communicated to Company, etc. Commanders the Commanding Officer and the Adjutant were hit by a bomb from a German aircraft, the former being seriously wounded and the latter killed. This caused some delay in the forward move of the Battalion and by that time the situation on the 13th Brigade front—including the location of troops in the front line—had changed. For these reasons, and there may have been others, the Battalion was unable to locate the gap it was supposed to fill. It located the Wiltshires, but in a different position from the one indicated, and also a Company of the 2nd Cameronians*. It did not, however, make contact with the 143rd Brigade. The Battalion took up a position on the right of the Wiltshires.

Major J. E. Wright now took command of the Battalion and Captain J. H. M. Hackett became acting Adjutant.

On the evening of the 28th at about 9 p.m. the Battalion began withdrawing by M.T. through Poperinghe to Hoogstade, where they were to come into reserve to troops holding the line of the River Yser. The roads were very congested and at some places were being shelled. Only a proportion of the M.T. arrived and the last Rifle Companies to leave had to march. Moving through Poperinghe part of the Battalion was misdirected, with the result that only 16 Officers and 140 Other Ranks arrived at Hoogstade.

It should be noted that A Company, who had become detached from the Battalion, formed part of 'Templeforce' under Major N. S. Temple. They subsequently guarded a sector of the Dunkirk perimeter during the latter stages of the evacuation, the gallant Major Temple being killed.

The last lap was now in sight. On the night of the 29/30th a move was made —partly in M.T. and partly by march route—through Isenberghe and Houthem to the Sand Dunes North of Moeres. During the 30th they dug in there and formed part of the reserve to troops holding the, now fairly close, perimeter round Dunkirk.

Half an hour after midnight on the 30/31st May the Battalion marched the four miles to Bray Dunes (east of Dunkirk) where they again came under the command of the 1st Division. Here, in the very early morning, attempts were made to launch boats from the beach with the object of embarking on ships lying off the coast. Owing to the contrary tide, and inexperience of the men in handling boats, these attempts mostly failed. At 8 a.m. they began an eight-mile march along the beach to Dunkirk. Arriving at the Mole at 11 a.m. the 5 Officers and 120 Other Ranks remaining with Battalion Headquarters embarked on S.S. *Malines* and arrived at Folkestone at about 4 p.m. Another 10 Officers and 20 men, who had succeeded in embarking at Bray Dunes, left that day.

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* It may interest readers to know that at that time the author was commanding the 2nd Cameronians in the 13th Brigade. He was very near the spot at the time the C.O. and Adjutant became casualties and this account is partly based on what he was told by Brigadier Dempsey at the time.

On arrival in England the 2nd Foresters began reorganizing at Tidworth on Salisbury Plain.

2/5th and 9th Battalions

As these two Battalions were in the same Brigade—139th Brigade (Brigadier H. A. F. Crewdson) of the 46th Division (Major-General H. O. Curtis)—their activities were generally similar and it will be convenient to consider them together.

When operations began on the 10th May 1940 the 2/5th (Lieut-Colonel H. B. Everard) was in the Rennes area and the 9th (Lieut-Colonel C. G. Lancaster) at St. Thurial.

During the next week the 139th Brigade moved forward to the Franco-Belgian frontier. The 17th May found it very dispersed, with the 9th Foresters well forward into Belgium holding posts at Alost, Oombergen, Audenarde and Escanaffles. Their duties were mainly concerned with traffic control on the route of withdrawal of the 2nd and 3rd Divisions. Much confusion and delay was caused by crowds of Belgian refugees and the Battalion did its best to sort out the muddle.

Meanwhile (on the 17th) the 2/5th Foresters had arrived at a wood at Baisieux, and on the following day they took up a defensive position on the Canal de la Haute Deule (a few miles South of Lille). They continued to occupy this position until the 23rd when they were relieved, but returned to positions in the same vicinity on the 25th. Here they were in support of French and French North African troops.

On the 19th the 9th Battalion withdrew from its positions in Belgium, and crossing the River Escaut took up a defensive position along the Scarpe Canal (South East of Arras) on the 22nd. Here they held the bridges on their sector while troops who had been fighting in Belgium passed through. On the 26th—when it was judged that all Allied troops had crossed—French engineers blew the bridges and the Battalion handed over to French and French North African troops. During their withdrawal they encountered much congestion on the roads due to the move of part of a French North African Division which was encumbered with a mass of horse-drawn wagons. At Pont au Marcq they were delayed for an hour by troops of this Division who were crossing their route.

On the 25th, when the 2/5th Foresters were still holding positions in the area of the Canal de la Haute Deule, the French troops whom they were supporting began to fall back and small parties of Germans—who had been attacking vigorously in the vicinity for twenty-four hours—started crossing the two canal bridges in the sector. The Battalion altered front and took up positions along a railway embankment. At about 6 p.m. on the 26th the Foresters, now supported by a Battalion of the Durham Light Infantry and some tanks, started to advance to re-establish their old line. However, as this movement was being executed orders were received from Headquarters 139th Brigade to cancel the advance. These instructions arrived too late as the Battalion was already at close grips with the enemy, who had chosen that moment to put in an attack of his own. As a result the 2/5th lost 7 officers and 49 other ranks, among them the Commanding Officer, Lieut-Colonel H. B. Everard, who was taken prisoner. The other six officers were killed. Major M. H. Cooper then took command and at 7.30 p.m. orders were received to withdraw and assemble in the village of Mons-en-Pevele.

The prolonged defence of this area, which centred on the town of Oignies, by British and French troops, had a marked effect on subsequent operations and, by halting one of the most dangerous German thrusts, greatly helped the withdrawal of other troops to Dunkirk.

Returning to the 9th Battalion we find that they embussed at Pont au Marcq on the 27th, their destination being Steenvorde. Owing to a mistake the lorries carrying C and D Companies went to Cassel. Here chaos reigned. The town was full of transport, both civil and military, refugees and detached parties of Allied soldiers. German guns were shelling the town and soon after the two Companies arrived enemy aircraft made an attack. The Foresters suffered heavy casualties, one lorry receiving a direct hit from a bomb.

Meanwhile the rest of the Battalion had arrived at Steenvorde, and started to make the town into a 'tank-proof' locality. Later they were joined by some of the survivors from C and D Companies.

On the 27th the 2/5th marched from Mons-en-Pevele to Avein and from there went by M.T. to Steenvoorde where they made contact with the 9th Battalion.

On the 28th both Battalions moved into the Dunkirk perimeter. They went to an area just South of the port where the 139th Brigade was responsible for the defences. The 9th Battalion held a sector of the Bergues Canal, just South of Fort Vallières, where they remained until the early hours of the 1st June. The 2/5th were at Teteghem where they held a reserve position covering six bridges; but on the 30th they moved forward some three miles to positions on the Bergues-Furnes Canal on the left of the 9th Battalion. They were relieved in these positions at 7 p.m. on the 31st and returned to billets at Teteghem. The 139th Brigade's sector of the defences was not heavily pressed by the enemy and apart from some shelling, and the presence of German patrols in the area, neither Battalion was seriously disturbed.

On the 1st June the 9th Battalion withdrew to Dunkirk where it embarked from the Mole. The 2/5th went to Malo les Bains (just east of Dunkirk) on the 1st June, and embarked on a variety of craft for England on the following day.

These two second line Territorial Battalions had been sent to France for constructional work and expecting that they would be able to complete their training before being committed to battle. The tempo of the Dunkirk Campaign changed all this. Armed with little more than rifles, on a low scale of transport and forming part of a Division lacking Artillery and other heavy equipment, the 2/5th and 9th Foresters displayed the staunchness which is customary in their Regiment and played a worthy part in the withdrawal to, and defence of, Dunkirk.

1/5th Battalion

With the break-through of the German mobile troops to the Channel Ports, and the isolation of the B.E.F. and the French Armies in the North, the French high command planned to hold the line of the River Somme in the hope of being able to build up a new Allied front covering Havre and Cherbourg. This hope was doomed to failure. The troops were too thin on the ground, they were considerably disorganized and many were of low morale. Disintegration had already gone too far, and it was found impossible to hold the line of the Somme, or any other line, for more than a few days—sometimes not more than a few hours.

The only British troops involved in operations immediately West of the Somme were the 51st (Highland) Division and a number of Lines of Communication troops, among whom were the 1/5th Foresters.

The system by which British troops did a spell in the Maginot Line, under direct French command, has been described earlier in this chapter. The 10th May found the 51st Division in this rôle and plans were made at once for them to return North to join the main body of the B.E.F.; but this could not be effected before the German drive had isolated the B.E.F. The 51st Division, therefore, moved to the Somme area.

The 1/5th Foresters remained at Nozay during the early days of the German advance, carrying out their normal duties as Lines of Communication troops. The first sign of war was noticed on the 18th May when Belgian refugees began to arrive in the Nozay area. After that the Battalion's duties became more active, consisting of patrolling for mythical parachutists and constructing and manning road blocks. Just before the German offensive began Lieut-Colonel H. H. Lilly had gone on a course in the United Kingdom, and Major B. D. Shaw was in command.

On the 26th the Battalion moved by train to Rouen, where on arrival (on the 27th) they bivouacked for the night on the Race Course. On the following day they moved into better quarters in a brickfield. Soon after this they became part of 'A' Brigade of 'Beauman Division' under Major-General A. B. Beauman, who had commanded Northern District on the Lines of Communication. The other units in the Brigade were the 4th Buffs and the 4th Border Regiment.

On the 31st the 1/5th Foresters moved by M.T. to an area some five miles South of Dieppe. En route some vehicles were machine-gunned by enemy aircraft, but there were no casualties.

During the next few days 'A' Brigade moved forward to the River Bresle where it came under the orders of the 51st Division which, as previously related, had just come from the Saar. On the 7th June A Company (Captain B. G. Butler) of the 1/5th Foresters was attached to the 4th Borders, where it was responsible for a very extended position along the river. During the next week this Company, although at times out of contact with all other troops, held its ground and carried out a gallant, although unsuccessful, counter attack. Part of the company was eventually overwhelmed by a large body of German troops when on the last lap of its withdrawal. A similar fate befell Captain Butler and the rest of the Company on the River Yeres at Fallencourt.*

Meanwhile the rest of the Battalion, after holding various defensive positions, withdrew to Fécamp on the 9th June. 'A' Brigade was now part of 'Arkforce' (which also included the 154th Brigade of the 51st Division) which was withdrawing to Havre with the object of covering the embarkation there of the rest of the 51st Division.

In an atmosphere of general uncertainty and confusion the Battalion (less A Company) continued its withdrawal to La Roquette, St. Jean-de-la-Neuville and St. Romain on the 10th June (where Major B. D. Shaw, the acting Commanding Officer, was reported missing and Major P. M. Robinson assumed Command), eventually arriving at Havre during the night of the 11/12th June.

By this time strong German forces advancing from the direction of Rouen to the South, had cut off the French IX Corps and the bulk of the 51st Division who were planning to embark from St. Valery en Caux. This proved impracticable and both formations surrendered on the 13th.

On the 12th June the 1/5th Foresters sailed from Havre at 11 a.m. and disembarked at Cherbourg at 8 p.m. Here attempts were being made to assemble another Allied Force to carry on the fight. The Foresters moved by M.T. to St. Pierre Eglise, where they began to reorganize. Here they were joined by 3 officers and about 170 men who had become separated from the rest of the Battalion at Fécamp on the 10th.

On the 13th they returned to Cherbourg, where they entrained at 7 p.m. for an unknown destination.

The sands were running out. Paris fell on the 14th. On the 16th M. Reynaud, the French Premier, resigned and was succeeded by Marshal Petain with the avowed object of making peace. Some days before this, however, it had become clear that the new front could not be established and the decision was made to withdraw all British troops from France. On the 15th the train carrying the 1/5th Foresters arrived at Brest where the troops had a hot meal and said 'Good-bye' to their two faithful French Agents de Liaison. They embarked on the following day on three ships—S.S.s *City of Christchurch*, *Yorkwood* and *Clan McBean*. These ships sailed independently that afternoon and arrived at Southampton about thirty-six hours later. Just before midnight on the 17/18th June the Battalion entrained for Sheffield.

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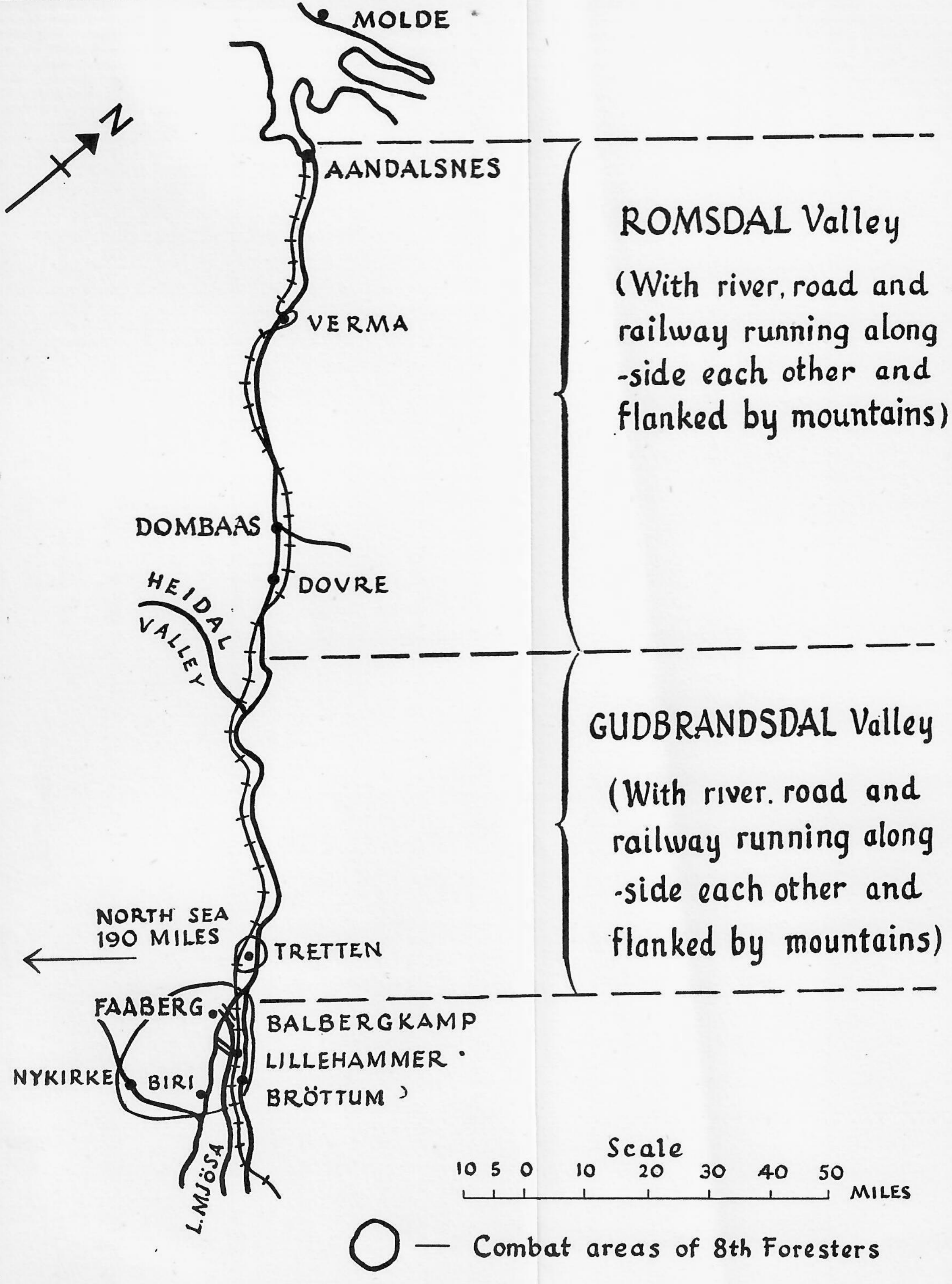
* A Company of the 1/5th Foresters and D Company 4th Borders are specially mentioned, for their stout defence of the Bresle crossings, in the official history (*The War in France and Flanders, 1939–1940*, by Major L. F. Ellis).

On the 21st June 1940, the Germans granted France an armistice, and the war entered a new phase. 'Dunkirk'—the name by which the campaign is popularly known—was one of the greatest military defeats in our history. It was not, however, due to failure in British leadership or fighting qualities. Lord Gort's small force was swamped by events which were completely beyond its control.

NORWAY (8th Battalion) SKETCH MAP No. II

APRIL – MAY 1940


N
MOLDE
AANDALSNES
VERMA
DOMBAAS
DOVRE
HEIDAL VALLEY
ROMSDAL Valley
(With river, road and railway running along-side each other and flanked by mountains)
GUDBRANDSDAL Valley
(With river, road and railway running along-side each other and flanked by mountains)
NORTH SEA 190 MILES
TRETTEN
FAABERG
BALBERGKAMP
LILLEHAMMER
NYKIRKE
BIRI
BRÖTTUM
L. MJÖSA
Scale
10 5 0 10 20 30 40 50
MILES
Combat areas of 8th Foresters

CHAPTER 5

NORWAY

April and May 1940

(See Sketch Maps II and III)

During the winter of 1939–40 and spring of 1940 when the 2nd, 1/5th, 2/5th and 9th Battalions of the Foresters were mustering in France, other Battalions of the Regiment—which had existed in peace or been formed since hostilities began—had been serving at home, training and absorbing the new equipment which was slowly—very slowly—coming into service.

Among these Battalions was the 8th Foresters, in the 148th Brigade, destined to go to Norway, and this Territorial Battalion was the first unit of the Regiment to engage the enemy in an active rôle in World War II.*

Soon after the outbreak of war the British and French governments gave serious attention to the position of the neutral Scandinavian countries, especially to the question of Swedish iron-ore. A large quantity of this vital commodity was finding its way to Germany via the Norwegian port of Narvik and thence south, inside Norwegian territorial waters, to Stavanger before making the short open sea journey to Hamburg.

On 30th November 1939 Russia invaded Finland. Although doomed to eventual defeat the Finns put up a gallant fight. The Allies were anxious to send a token force to help them and the idea was conceived that the passage of these troops through Northern Norway and Sweden to Finland might be combined with action to disrupt the passage of the Swedish ore to Germany. The British Government was hesitant, and indeed in retrospect it seems that the project was a most reckless one, which might well have ended in disaster. Meanwhile, on the 12th March 1940, Russia and Finland concluded peace and, as the Swedes and Norwegians were bitterly opposed to even the slightest breach of neutrality, the idea of putting troops into either country hung fire, although it was not entirely shelved.

Whether the Germans got word of these designs, or were influenced by other considerations, is still in doubt; but on the 9th April they invaded Denmark and Norway. The landings were carried out in an extremely efficient manner by troops specially trained for operations in mountains and snow.

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* It might be said that some units (among them the 2nd Foresters) had been in action earlier in the Maginot Line (see Chapter 4), but they were only involved in minor patrol clashes and not as units.

The British and French governments decided immediately to support the Norwegians by sending strong Naval forces to Norwegian waters and landing troops at various places on the Norwegian coast.

This is the background to the Norwegian campaign in which the 8th Foresters took part. The campaign was not a success and by 10th June all our forces had re-embarked. For the purpose of this history it will not be necessary to describe the widely dispersed actions of the campaign—other than on the front where the 8th Foresters were engaged.

(Details of the activities of the 8th Foresters in this campaign are difficult to obtain. Such accounts as exist were apparently written some time after the event.)

The 8th Foresters had spent the first months of war in the Newark area, guarding vulnerable points and training. In February 1940 the Battalion was sent on leave in two batches, new weapons and equipment were issued on what was then regarded as a lavish scale and the Commanding Officer was summoned to the War Office. It was clear that big events were impending and on the 28th February the unit was put on an active service footing. These measures were in preparation for the Allied project to help the Finns—via Norway and Sweden—outlined above. Although the Russian-Finnish war ended early in March 1940 it seems that the idea of an Anglo-French expedition to Scandinavia was not abandoned. On the 6th April the Battalion journeyed to Rosyth, part of it embarked on H.M.S. *Glasgow* the following morning and plans for a totally different operation to the one which actually took place were discussed. All this was cancelled at short notice when H.M.S. *Glasgow* and other warships in the Firth were ordered to sea. The 8th Foresters moved to a camp some eleven miles away at Dunfermline, where they remained for a few days, and it was during their stay there that the Germans invaded Norway.

On the 14th April the Battalion (less B and D Companies) embarked on the liner R.M.S. *Orion* and B and D Companies on the Light Cruisers *Arethusa* and *Galatea.* Even at this late stage there was a change of plan and on the 16th—the ships still being in the Firth of Forth—that part of the battalion on the *Orion* was transferred to the *Arethusa* and *Galatea.* This involved moving not only the men, but the stores: a stiff wind was blowing and it was dark. As can be imagined, there were many difficulties and much confusion. Some stores were left behind, including some of the 8th Foresters mortar ammunition.

On the evening of the 18th April the convoy reached Molde Fiord, the gateway to the small tourist port of Aandalsnes, on the Southern portion of the West coast of Norway and about 230 miles North-West of Oslo. Disembarkation took place partly at Molde, and partly at Aandalsnes, those disembarking at the former being conveyed by coastal steamer to Aandalsnes.

At this time the officer state of the Battalion was a follows:

Commanding Officer . .	Lieut-Colonel T. A. Ford
2nd-in-Command . . .	Major J. K. L. Roberts

Company Commanders:

A	Captain E. G. C. Beckwith
B	Captain P. J. Branston
C	Captain M. Redmayne
D	Major J. Kirkland
HQ	Major B. H. Dowson

It will now be as well to give a brief summary of the composition and aims of the force based on Aandalsnes.

The original force consisted of the 148th Brigade (Brigadier H. de R. Morgan) comprising 1/5th Bn. The Leicestershire Regiment, the 8th Bn. The Sherwood Foresters, and 168th Light Anti-Aircraft Battery.

Later this force was followed by the 15th Infantry Brigade (Brigadier H. E. T. Smyth), and some additional supporting units. On the 20th April the whole force came under command of Major-General B. C. T. Paget.

Brigadier Morgan's orders were changed several times. The final version—which reached him from the Chief of the Imperial General Staff direct while he was at sea—instructed him to secure Dombaas (about 60 miles South-East of Aandalsnes) and make contact with Norwegian G.H.Q. believed to be in the area of Lillehammer (about 80 miles South-East of Dombaas).

At this time Norway was still under heavy snow and it was bitterly cold at night. The troops had not been given any special training in semi-arctic warfare and, in many respects, their clothing and equipment were unsuited to the conditions.

Moving by train D Company of the Foresters reached Dombaas at 4 a.m. on the 19th April, followed shortly after by A Company. Five miles to the South were some sixty survivors of a German parachute party who were surrounded by a Norwegian Battalion. Arrangements were made for D Company to attack, but before they could do so the Germans surrendered. The force was now in a position to continue the move South down the Gudbrandsdal Valley.

Into this narrow corridor are crammed the railway, the main road and a river. At the edges rich forests of spruce sprawl up the lower slopes—the land rising gradually, then steeply, to a snow-capped ridge. The forests and the mountains are huge and impressive, but the very narrowness of the valley confines any military operation to a restricted front. The valley has tributaries leading away to the east and west, but these are small, and often come to dead ends.

Towards the south the line comes to the town of Lillehammer. In peace time this colony of quaint wooden houses had been a tourist centre. It was clean, compact and picturesque. The river widens into a lake, which, even in April, was still frozen over. It was at this point that the Foresters divided. 'A' and 'D' Companies went to the west, 'B' and 'C' to the east.

In this area was General Ruge, the Commander-in-Chief, with a substantial part of the small Norwegian Army which was opposing German troops advancing North-West up both sides of Lake Mjösa.

The Foresters moved forward again in very bad weather, in lorries provided by the Norwegians. On the 20th April, they were deployed on both sides of the Lake as follows:

> A and D Companies (West Group)—First at Nykirke, but were later withdrawn to Hellerud, near Biri.
>
> Battalion Headquarters, B and C Companies (East Group)—East of the Lake at Bröttum.

Later two and a half Companies of the Leicestershires arrived and were sent to Lillehammer.

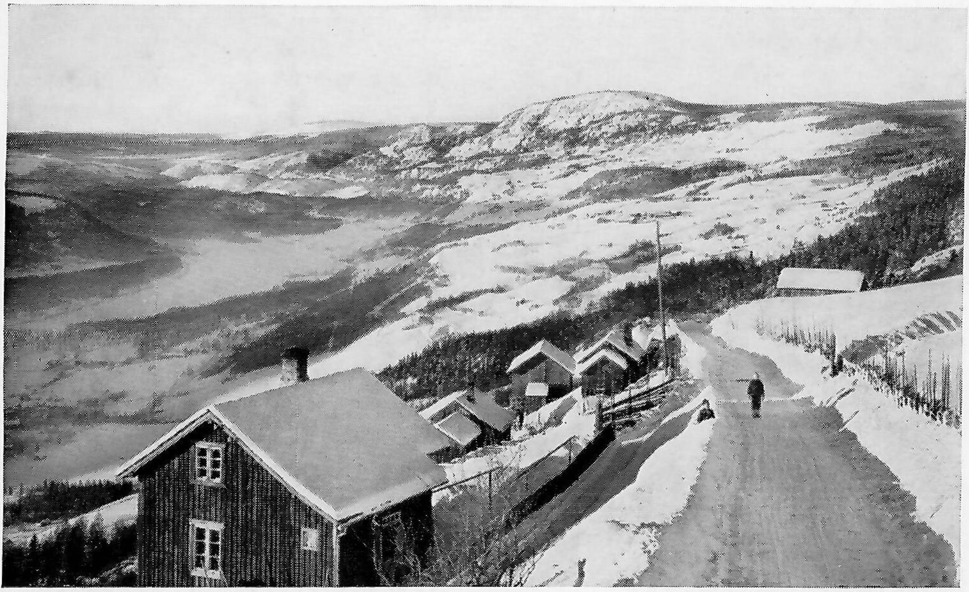
On the 21st Norwegian troops withdrew through the positions held by East group and B and C Companies came under considerable enemy pressure. Acting on orders they withdrew some twelve miles to a position on the Balbergkamp covering Faaberg at the North end of Lake Mjösa. Here the Leicestershires (weakened by some of their civilian troop-carrying vehicles overrunning their destination) and B and C Companies of the Foresters, held the position alone, as the Norwegians had withdrawn to the North to rest and reorganize. By 3.30 p.m. on the 22nd German troops, operating in the hills to the East, had outflanked this position and created a very ugly situation. Headquarters 148th Brigade, some distance in rear, was attacked by an enemy ski patrol. This resulted in a hurried withdrawal to Tretten about 17 miles further North. Transport was short and a good deal of stores and kit had to be left behind in order to get the men into the available vehicles.

A and D Companies to the West of the lake had not been seriously engaged; but, acting on orders, they conformed to the movement of B and C Companies and also withdrew to Tretten. This movement was not made by the direct route through Faaberg, which was considered too hazardous; but in lorries, by night, in a long detour over ice-covered mountain roads, through Gausdal.

It will be as well to digress here in order to emphasize the disadvantages under which the British troops operated. Apart from their deficiencies in equipment, they lacked specialized training, and were incapable of operating in deep snow any considerable distance from a road. The highly trained German ski troops were always able to outflank them, and we had insufficient men on the ground to frustrate them by organizing our defences in depth. The second point, perhaps the biggest factor in the campaign as a whole, was the enemy's complete mastery of the air.

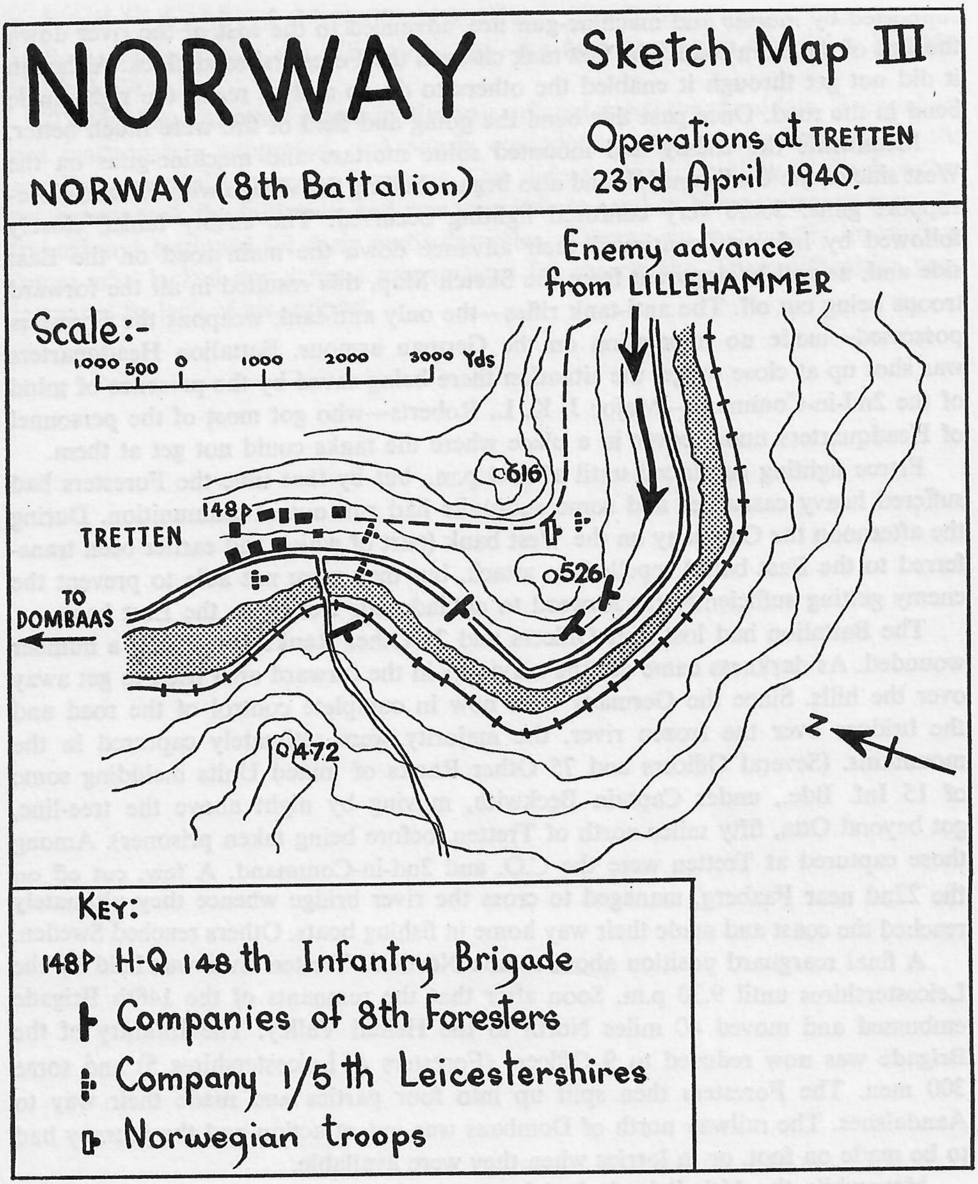
The troops had now mostly been without food and sleep for 36 hours, and the prospects of a successful defence of the Tretten position did not seem good. Its defence for at least one day was, however, regarded as most important in order to secure the bridge in the village over which Norwegian troops, who had been operating West of Lake Mjösa (in the same area as A and D Companies of the Foresters), were to withdraw.

The Maginot Line, France—November 1939
His Majesty King George VI visits the 2nd Battalion



Norway—1940. The 8th Battalion's Last Stand

Showing the high ground held by the Battalion, as seen when looking North from the German position


NORWAY
Sketch Map III
Operations at TRETTEN
23rd April 1940.
NORWAY (8th Battalion)
Enemy advance from LILLEHAMMER
Scale:-
1000 500 0 1000 2000 3000 Yds
616
148
TRETTEN
526
TO DOMBAAS
472
N
KEY:
148 H-Q 148th Infantry Brigade
Companies of 8th Foresters
Company 1/5th Leicestershires
Norwegian troops

The dispositions of the troops are shown in Sketch Map III. As will be apparent the position was naturally a strong one; but it could be outflanked from the East by troops well trained to conditions in snow mountains.

At about 1 p.m. the battle began, when five* enemy tanks and some infantry, supported by mortar and machine-gun fire, advanced to the east of the river down the axis of the main road. The first tank charged the Foresters' road block. Although it did not get through it enabled the others to do so and to reach the right angle bend in the road. Once past this bend the going and field of fire were much better.

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* One account says five and another three tanks. It seems likely that there were originally five; but that two became casualties, or were held back, and only three actually held the position.

Meanwhile the enemy had mounted some mortars and machine-guns on the West side of the Gudbransdal, and also began shelling the village with 5.9-cm. close-support guns. Some very confused fighting occurred. The enemy tanks, closely followed by infantry, continued their advance down the main road on the East side and, as will be apparent from the Sketch Map, this resulted in all the forward troops being cut off. The anti-tank rifles—the only anti-tank weapons the Foresters possessed—made no impression on the German armour. Battalion Headquarters was shot up at close range, the situation there being saved by the presence of mind of the 2nd-in-Command—Major J. K. L. Roberts—who got most of the personnel of Headquarters under cover in a place where the tanks could not get at them.

Fierce fighting continued until after 4 p.m., but by that time the Foresters had suffered heavy casualties and some sub-units had run out of ammunition. During the afternoon the Company on the West bank (part of which had earlier been transferred to the East bank) repelled an attack, but they were not able to prevent the enemy getting sufficiently far forward to enfilade our troops on the East bank.

The Battalion had lost four Officers and 21 Other Ranks killed, and a number wounded. As darkness came on, the survivors in the forward area tried to get away over the hills. Since the Germans were now in complete control of the road and the bridges over the frozen river, the majority were ultimately captured in the mountains. (Several Officers and 75 Other Ranks of mixed Units including some of 15 Inf. Bde., under Captain Beckwith, moving by night above the tree-line, got beyond Otta, fifty miles north of Tretten, before being taken prisoner). Among those captured at Tretten were the C.O. and 2nd-in-Command. A few, cut off on the 22nd near Faaberg, managed to cross the river bridge whence they ultimately reached the coast and made their way home in fishing boats. Others reached Sweden.

A final rearguard position about a mile North of Tretten river was held by the Leicestershires until 9.30 p.m. Soon after that the remnants of the 148th Brigade embussed and moved 40 miles North to the Heidal Valley. The Infantry of the Brigade was now reduced to 9 Officers (Foresters 4, Leicestershires 5) and some 300 men. The Foresters then split up into four parties and made their way to Aandalsnes. The railway north of Dombaas was out of action and the journey had to be made on foot, or in lorries when they were available.

Meanwhile the 15th Brigade had landed at Aandalsnes and moved South. On the 25th April at Kvam (about 35 miles North of Tretten) they got the worst of an engagement with the Germans and had to withdraw, although their losses were far less than those of the 148th Brigade.

The small body of surviving Foresters who reached Aandalsnes early in May returned to Scotland in a convoy consisting of their old friends H.M.S.s *Arethusa, Galatea* and *Glasgow*, which reached Gourock on the 5th May 1940. For his initiative and cool leadership of this party of survivors, the Quartermaster, Captain J. F. Hallam, was awarded the Military Cross—the first decoration won by a Forester in World War II.

The landings at other places in Norway suffered much the same fate. Everywhere our inadequately supported, and poorly equipped, troops were outclassed by the usually numerically superior Germans. Our defeat was due mainly to the fact that the enemy took the initiative, and was thus able to send to Norway troops specially trained and equipped for their particular rôles, whereas we sent hastily improvised forces who lacked any serious preparations for their tasks. Their difficulties were increased by lack of air support.

CHAPTER 6

THE MIDDLE EAST

Palestine, Cyprus, Egypt and the Western Desert (Tobruk)
September 1939 to June 1942

(See Sketch Maps IV and V)

After the disastrous campaigns in Norway and in Belgium and France in 1940, described in the two previous chapters, the main pre-occupation of the British Fighting Services was the defence of the United Kingdom, which came under heavy air attack and was threatened with invasion and starvation. All Battalions of the Sherwood Foresters, except one, were to be part of Home Forces for the next eighteen months. The exception was the 1st Battalion in the Middle East, whose adventures will be described in this chapter.

1. PALESTINE AND CYPRUS

The outbreak of war found the 1st Foresters, under the Command of Lieut-Colonel W. A. Ebsworth, based on Haifa in Palestine, but with D Company (Major E. H. Collins) in Cyprus and another Company, which was rotated periodically, on detachment at Shafa Amr.

The Battalion was part of the 1st Cavalry Division (Major-General J. G. W. Clark). With the war the attitude of the inhabitants of Palestine changed. The Jews sided wholeheartedly with Britain, France and Poland, whilst Arab hostility to the Mandatory Power declined, although it did not entirely cease. The result was a considerable easement of the turbulent conditions which had existed before the war; but minor incidents, and occasional outbreaks of disorder, continued. One of the Foresters' main duties was to carry out 'flag marches', usually at Company strength, to various villages in the vicinity.

The more tranquil conditions afforded better opportunities for training, and in January 1940 the Battalion spent three weeks in the Gaza area doing platoon, company and battalion training.

During the Spring of 1940 new regulations for the purchase of land were promulgated by the authorities. These were bitterly resented by the Jews and on the 2nd March matters came to a head when some 3000 Jews demonstrated against the Government in the streets of Haifa. By 11 a.m. six Platoons of the Foresters, together with detachments from other units, were standing by. For some time tension remained high; but in a few weeks it had subsided, only to be revived temporarily when the Jews staged 'May Day' celebrations on the 1st May.

Soon after this active operations began in France and Belgium and by early June the fall of France was imminent. This provided Mussolini with a temptation which he was unable to resist, and he hastened to join his German friends before the fighting was entirely over—no doubt in order to claim some share in the victory. On the 10th June 1940 Italy declared war on France and Britain. This extended the war area to the Middle East, where numerically strong Italian forces occupied the Italian North African colony of Libya. Apart, however, from patrol clashes, and rearguard actions when the Italians made a short advance into Egypt, no serious operations took place in North Africa until the following December.

In the meantime, on the 9th June 1940—as part of the plans made in anticipation of Italy's entry into the war—the 1st Foresters left Haifa in the T.S. *Talma* for Cyprus, arriving at Famagusta in the early afternoon of the following day.

Apart from frequent air raids, which were never very heavy, the Battalion's stay in Cyprus was notable for only one incident—not a very big one from the point of view of the war as a whole; but of considerable importance to the participants—B Company.

During the winter of 1940–41 plans for raids on, and in some cases the occupation of, the Italian held Dodecanese Islands, off the South-west coast of Turkey, were considered.

Early in February 1941 B Company (Major L. C. Cooper) was ordered to prepare for operations of a secret nature. On the 22nd February the Company Commander was given some further details, but he was not told the location of the enterprise or shown any maps.

The Company embarked at Famagusta late on the 24th February on the ex-yacht *Rosaura*, and sailed at 4.20 a.m. on the following day. It was then that Major Cooper opened the sealed envelope which had been given to him before embarkation. In this it was revealed that the destination was the Island of Castelorizo (one of the Dodecanese), which was to be captured by a Commando Force, followed closely by B Company who were to garrison the place. This was an example of security being carried too far. The Company Commander had no chance to make a proper plan, or discuss details with his superiors or subordinates, until after embarkation.

At about 10 a.m. a message was received stating that some 200 Commandos, and some Naval personnel, had landed at Castelorizo with only slight resistance and were in possession of the Island.

At 5 p.m. one of the escorting destroyers was sent on ahead to find out and report details of the water supply on the Island and other matters. Meanwhile the weather had deteriorated and the *Rosaura* was rolling heavily. At 2 a.m. on the 25th, when the force was about 12 miles from the Island, the destroyer returned.

She reported that two Italian ships were in the harbour alongside the quay and that a counter-attack seemed to be in progress. Shortly after this the *Rosaura* was ordered to proceed to Alexandria.

It transpired that immediately the Italians heard of the landing of the Commandos they sent two gunboats and 200 soldiers to the island. The Commandos were eventually subjected to heavy fire from the guns of the gunboats and heavily attacked from the air. Short of food and ammunition they dispersed, and the Italians appear to have regained control of the Island.

In the meanwhile B Company had arrived at Alexandria. The change from the *Rosaura* to the two destroyers—H.M.S. *Decoy* and H.M.S. *Hero*—was quickly carried out. Within one hour and ten minutes of their arrival in Egypt the first shipload of troops was at sea once more.

Major Cooper and half the Company travelled in *Decoy*, followed fifty-five minutes later by the other half, under Captain W. H. A. Becke, in *Hero*.

The destroyers made full speed for the island, and during the day plans for the landing on Castelorizo were discussed. Five whalers were to be used for the operation, each carrying a crew of four Naval ratings and ten soldiers.

At 11 p.m. the island was sighted by *Decoy*. The landing party stood by at its boat stations. Ahead of them a dark chunk of land stood out against the night. There was no moon to light the way and a brisk wind was blowing. It was cold and occasionally raining.

The engine room telegraphs rang *Decoy* to a standstill and the troops filed into the boats. The sea was choppy, and the Naval ratings found the rowing hard. The unskilled soldiers were able to offer them little help. The journey to the shore was eight hundred yards, and it took them twenty minutes. Even then the landing place, in a small bay, was rocky, slippery and hard to secure. There were difficulties in unloading the stores.

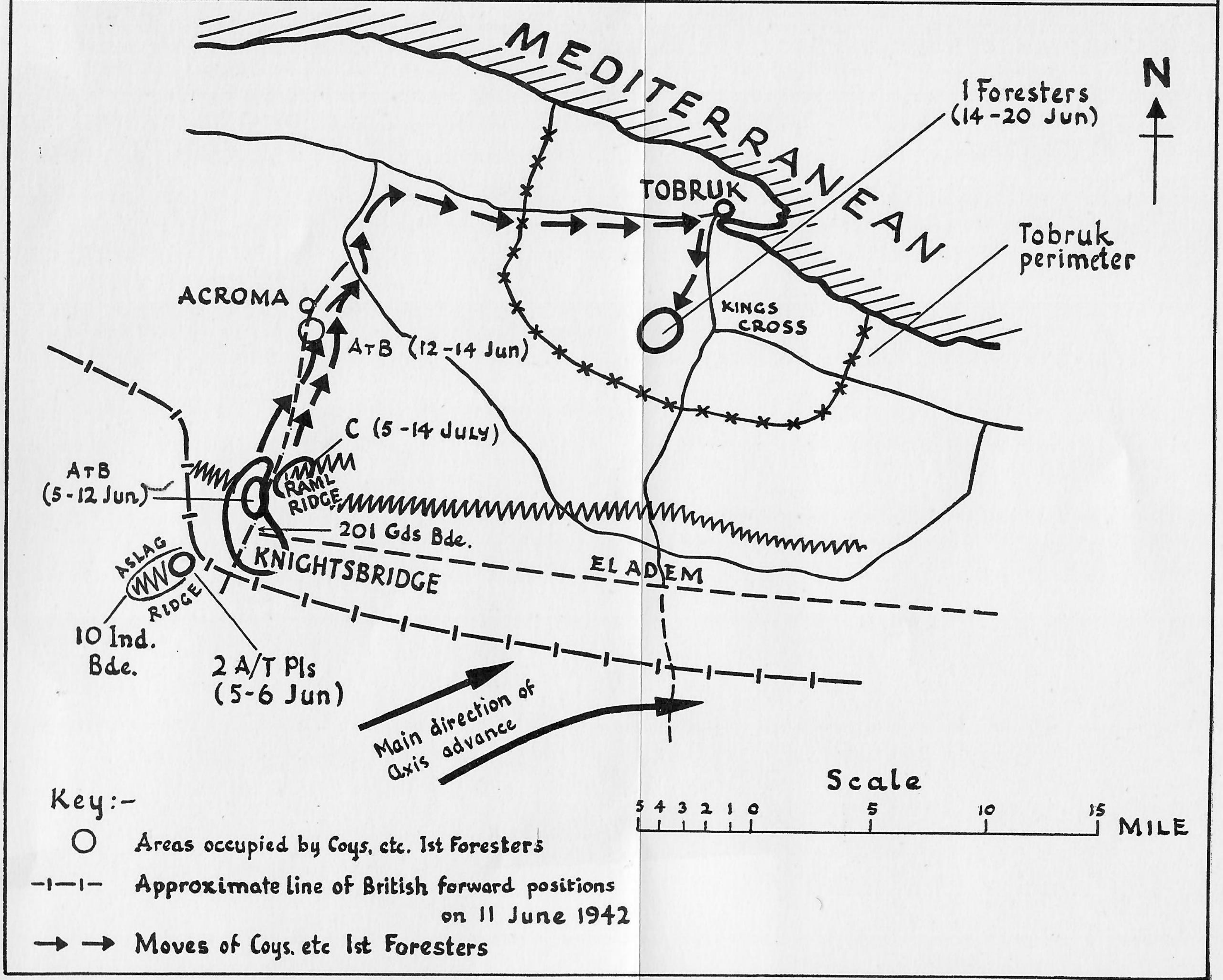
During the journey they had seen no signs of the Commandos, save for a flickering torch. There was still no sound of firing; no clue to the general situation. At last the troops were safely ashore. One platoon was straightway ordered up a narrow track, with instructions to form a protective screen around the bridgehead. The remainder of the party was employed in humping the stores off the whalers. Major Cooper, accompanied by his orderly and a Naval signaller, set off to find the commanding officer of the Commandos. They walked for some minutes up a track, and presently came to a stone breastwork. They found that it contained uniform, equipment and several boxes of ammunition. A few minutes later they passed the dead body of a British soldier, and soon afterwards two men of the Commandos crawled out of a hole in the ground, sadly demoralized. They said that they had been trying to swim across to Turkey, for the rest of their force had been wiped out.

Major Cooper and his companions moved on. They had not gone much further, when they met an N.C.O. and a private soldier. The N.C.O. explained that he did not know whether any of his officers were left alive. As well as being bombarded by aircraft and the gunboats, two enemy destroyers had shelled the island. The

WESTERN DESERT

(1st Battalion) 5th to 20th June 1942

SKETCH MAP
No. IV


MEDITERRANEAN
N
1 Foresters
(14-20 Jun)
TOBRUK
Tobruk
perimeter
ACROMA
KINGS
CROSS
A+B (12-14 Jun)
C (5-14 JULY)
A+B
(5-12 Jun)
RAML
RIDGE
201 Gds Bde.
KNIGHTSBRIDGE
EL ADEM
ASLAG
RIDGE
10 Ind.
Bde.
2 A/T Pls
(5-6 Jun)
Main direction of
Axis advance
Scale
5 4 3 2 1 0 5 10 15 MILE
Key:-
○ Areas occupied by Coys, etc. 1st Foresters
-I-I- Approximate line of British forward positions on 11 June 1942
→ → Moves of Coys. etc 1st Foresters

Italian forces landed on the previous day had been implemented by a transport carrying troops, which had come in during the night.

Major Cooper made his way back to the bridgehead, taking the Commandos with him. From there he sent out two patrols to contact the remainder of the force. He signalled news of the situation to the commander of *Decoy*, who replied that the commanding officer and nine Commando officers were already on board *Hero*. He said that the Italian transport had landed her troops, and that the enemy was now in possession of the port. A third patrol was then despatched to recover the Commando wounded. Major Cooper returned to the ship for a conference.

The situation offered two alternatives. The Foresters could land as many stores as possible, and prepare to attack the port at dawn; but, if this were to be possible, Naval support must be relied upon to deal with the harbour and to give supporting fire. The Naval officer replied to this scheme by showing Major Cooper an instruction which made it quite clear that the warships must be clear of the island by 4.30 a.m. Under such circumstances, it was reasoned, the tactical situation made any attempt to hold Castelorizo out of the question. Major Cooper, therefore, decided to withdraw his force. The Naval officer agreed.

In pitch darkness, fighting against a steadily rising sea, the small force returned to the destroyer. The force was clear of the Island by 3 a.m. and sailed towards Crete, where it arrived that afternoon. The Commandos were landed, and the Foresters were put ashore for a hot meal. They sailed again, after two and a quarter hours, for Alexandria.

On the journey from Crete to Alexandria Major Cooper was walking from the bridge to the wardroom, when a large wave washed him overboard. He was spotted by a sailor in the aft gun turret, who slung him a rope and gave the alarm. The company commander was hauled aboard some fifteen minutes later—a very lucky escape.

B Company arrived at Alexandria at 6.45 p.m. on March 2nd. It remained there for four days, when it returned to Cyprus.

So this unhappy operation came to an end. B Company of the 1st Foresters had done all that was humanly possible, but on the higher level it had been a muddled affair from the start. As the official historian writes: 'It was evident that there was much to be learned about the conduct of this sort of operation. . . .'*

II. EGYPT AND THE WESTERN DESERT (TOBRUK)

Little of importance occurred during the Battalions remaining nine months in Cyprus, and in December 1941 news came that they were to go to Egypt.

The move was completed on the 5th January 1942, the Foresters being quartered at Mena, near Cairo. Here they were much split up. Parties were attached to the 14th New Zealand Brigade to gain experience of desert conditions and C Company went to The Middle East School of Camouflage. A month later an advanced party of six officers and twenty-six other ranks was sent to the Turkish–Syrian border—in anticipation of the Battalion moving there to supervise the construction of frontier defences. After much travail the advanced party was recalled and the whole project abandoned.

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* *History of The Second World War—The Mediterranean and Middle East. I*, by Major-General I. S. O. Playfair, page 326.

On the 26th February 1942 the Commanding Officer (now Lieut-Colonel W. A. Platt) was informed that the 1st Foresters were to become a Motor Battalion and that, after a period for re-organization and training for the new rôle, they might expect to go into action in April. The next two months were spent in preparation, assisted by Officers and men of the 1st Bn. The Rifle Brigade—a Motor Battalion with desert experience.

It will be as well to give a brief description of the organization and equipment of a Motor Battalion designed, as it was, primarily to provide an infantry element in the Armoured Division. It consisted of Battalion Headquarters, a Headquarter Company, an Anti-tank Company and three Motor Companies. Each Motor Company consisted of one 3-in. Mortar Detachment, one Platoon of Bren Carriers and two Platoons in wheeled vehicles (15-cwt. trucks). The Anti-tank Company comprised four Platoons, each of four 6-pr. Anti-tank guns.

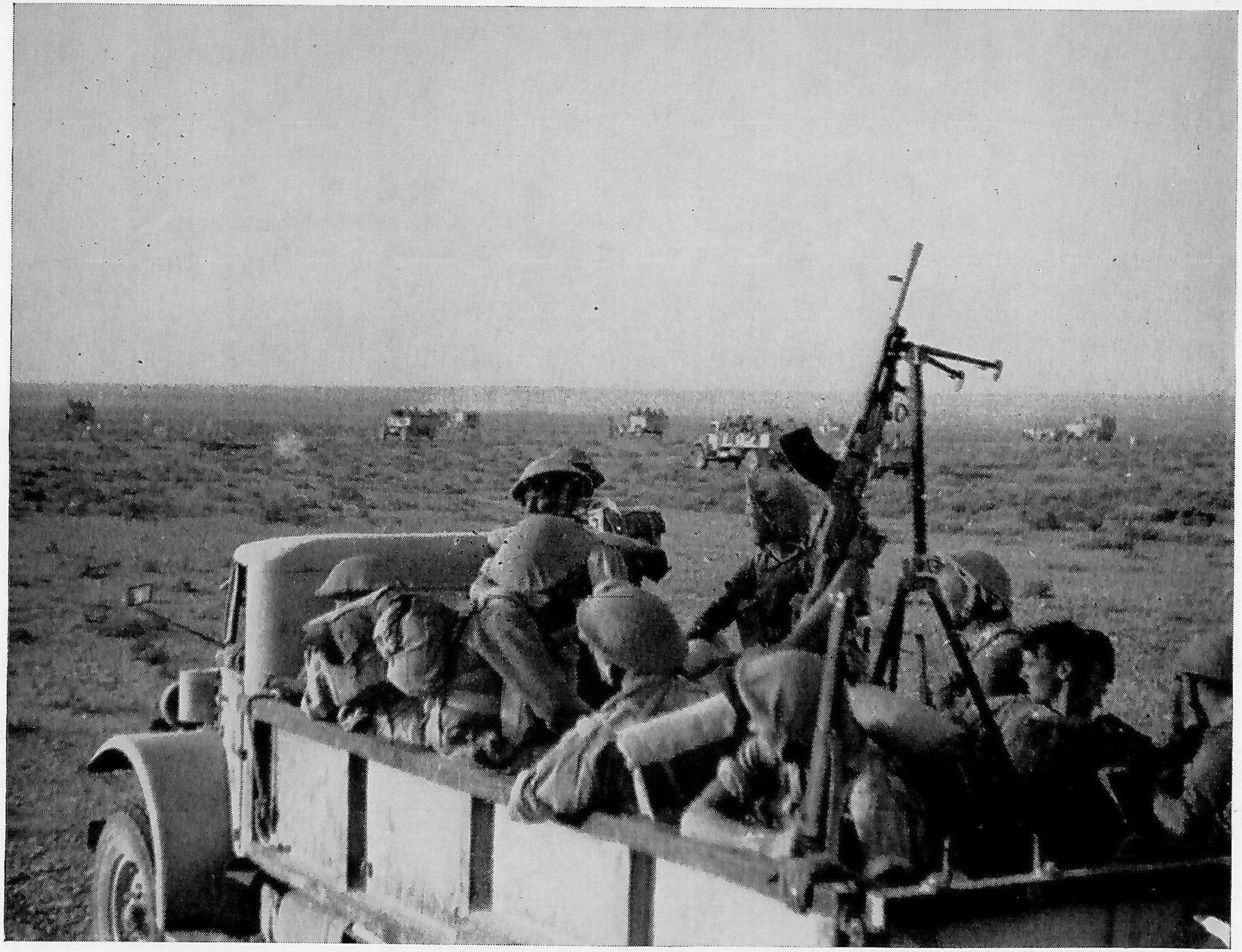
On the 26th May 1942, when the Battalion was out on a night operation, a message was received that they were to return to camp and proceed to the desert on the following day.

We must now digress, and look back for a period, in order to see how the war situation in North Africa had developed by the early summer of 1942.

In the Spring of 1941 the redoubtable General Erwin Rommel and his German-Italian Army had driven our weakened forces back from the ground gained by Lieut-General Sir Richard O'Connor's victory, in the winter of 1940–41, to the frontier of Egypt. Here the enemy was halted. It should be noted that an important factor in halting them was General Wavell's decision to hold the port of Tobruk as a thorn in the enemy's side, after they had by-passed it and were some one hundred miles to the East. In the middle of June 1941 an unsuccessful British offensive—Operation 'Battleaxe'—was staged. Another offensive (Operation 'Crusader'), in December was more successful and resulted in the capture of Benghazi and the withdrawal of Rommel's forces to the west of Cyrenaica.

In the spring and summer of 1942 the German-Italian forces carried out a major counter-offensive which drove the British Commonwealth forces out of Cyrenaica for the second time. As the enemy troops advanced westwards towards the Egyptian frontier General Auchinleck (who had by this time succeeded General Wavell as Commander-in-Chief in the Middle East) decided to repeat his predecessor's strategy and hold Tobruk. We can now return to the story of the 1st Foresters, who are left, at the end of May 1942, about to move as a reinforcement to the Eighth Army in the Desert.

Moving through Mersa Matruh and Fort Capuzzo the Battalion arrived at Tobruk on the 3rd June 1942.



North Africa—1st Battalion 1942
Motorized Infantry moving up to the battle area near Knightsbridge

On that date the Officer state was as follows:

Commanding Officer	Lieut-Colonel A. S. Edwards
2nd-in-Command	Major H. D. Pyman
Adjutant	Lieut. P. W. Allsebrook
Intelligence Officer	Lieut. F. Fisher
Quartermaster	Lieut. H. F. Whittle

Company Commanders:

A	Major J. C. Temple
B	Captain J. R. Mills
C	Captain A. C. F. Godwin
D (Anti-tank)	Major C. S. Higgins
HQ	Captain R. B. Gofton-Salmond

At that time Tobruk was a very war-scarred port. Few houses had escaped damage from bombardment and in the small harbour the hulks of several bombed ships were visible.

On the first night in Tobruk the Battalion was under command of the 2nd South African Division (Major-General H. B. Klopper).* On the next day (4th June) they moved out of Tobruk and came under the 1st Armoured Division (Major-General H. Lumsden). By 2 p.m. they had taken up a position on the Raml Ridge (about 12 miles to the South-West of the South-West corner of the Tobruk perimeter). It was near here that Lieut-Colonel A. S. Edwards, who had only recently taken over command, was injured in a car crash and had to go to hospital in Tobruk. He was succeeded by Major H. D. Pyman.

By this time the Gazala battle, some 30 miles to the West of Tobruk, was in full swing; but, as yet, undecided. As a precautionary measure the perimeter defences round Tobruk were manned with the 2nd South African Division on the right (West) flank and the 11th Indian Infantry Brigade to the left (East). The Foresters were later to become part of the Tobruk garrison reserve, but at this stage were employed outside the perimeter.

The Battalion re-deployed during the night of the 4/5th June and at dawn on the 5th June were disposed as follows (see Sketch Map No. IV).

A and B Company had gone forward to reinforce the hard pressed 201st Guards Brigade in the 'Knightsbridge' Box.

C Company was in position on the Raml Ridge.

D (*Anti-Tank*) Company had two sections split up among A, B and C Companies and the remaining two (under Lieut. E. J. Woodsend and 2/Lieut. J. Dolphin) were on their way to the 10th Indian Brigade on the Aslag Ridge (7 miles South-West of 'Knightsbridge').

The two sections of Anti-tank guns sent to the 10th Indian Brigade arrived on the evening of the 5th after that Brigade, in conjunction with the 22nd Armoured Brigade and the 32nd Army Tank Brigade, had carried out an unsuccessful counter attack. In anticipation of a move at short notice during the night these two sections were ordered to keep their guns on the 'portees'. When dawn came on the 6th they found themselves within close range of a group of German Mark V tanks. The Foresters succeeded in getting into action, but not before the enemy tanks opened fire. The short, but very sharp, action which followed resulted in the destruction of eleven German tanks against seven out of eight anti-tank guns. Meanwhile other enemy tanks had worked round the flanks and the two Officers and about forty other ranks became prisoners. After that the Anti-tank Company was reorganized and took up positions in support of C Company on the Raml Ridge.

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* On the 14th June Major-General Klopper assumed Command of all troops in Tobruk.

For the next six days the situation on the 1st Foresters' fronts remained unchanged. C Company improved their positions by putting up wire and laying over 1000 mines. On the 12th June Lieut-Colonel Edwards, who had returned to the Battalion after his car accident, entered hospital again and was evacuated to Egypt. Major Pyman commanded the Battalion for the rest of the operations. On the same day A and B Companies were ordered to withdraw from the 'Knightsbridge' box to fresh positions south of Acroma (about 18 miles West of Tobruk).

On the morning of the 13th Battalion Headquarters and C Company were heavily dive-bombed by Stukas and JU.88s. Four other ranks were killed and one officer and thirteen other ranks wounded.

By this time the main operation to the West was going badly and for the next few days columns of units and stragglers from the 'Knightsbridge' battle were making their way into the Tobruk perimeter. Enemy aircraft and artillery were active, morale was low among some of the retreating troops and there was much confusion.

On the 14th the Foresters entered the Tobruk perimeter. Casualties had already been heavy—approximately as follows: Battalion Headquarters and Headquarter Company 20, A Company 8, B Company one Platoon missing and some wounded, C Company two Platoons missing and D (Anti-Tank) Company two Platoons missing (only 7 guns left).

By the 15th June Rommel's leading troops (21st Panzer and 90th Light Divisions) had by-passed Tobruk to the South. On the following day they cut the main road (via Balbia) to the East, and from then it can be said that Tobruk was beseiged. By this time the Foresters had become part of the 201st Guards Brigade (Brigadier H. F. Johnson), the other units being the 3rd Coldstream Guards and the 1st Worcesters. All were now inside the Tobruk perimeter.

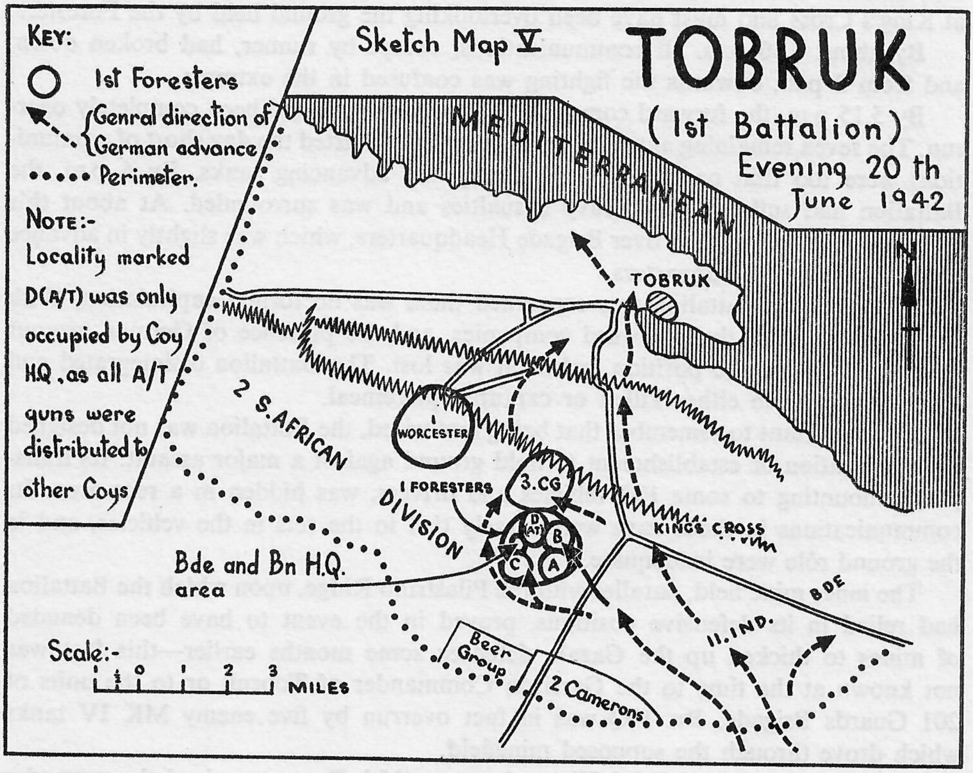
By dawn on the 20th—when the assault on Tobruk began—the situation was as follows:

The perimeter was still held by the 2nd South African Division (right) and the 11th Indian Infantry Brigade (left).

The 32nd Army Tank Brigade and the 201st Guards Brigade formed the main reserve. The 201st Guards Brigade was located about 3 miles behind the centre of the perimeter, slightly to the West of the junction of the 2nd South African Division and the 11th Indian Brigade. The Tanks were further to the rear.

The garrison included a formidable array of Medium and Field Artillery, with plenty of ammunition. There was, however, a shortage of 6-pr. Anti-tank guns—the only effective Anti-tank weapons against German armour which we possessed at that time. Moreover these guns were a new issue and their crews were not familiar with them: the Foresters had only fired theirs twice.

The 1st Foresters were on the left (East) of the 201st Guards Brigade, behind the junction of the 2nd Cameron Highlanders (British Battalion of the 11th Indian Brigade) and 'BEER' Group of South Africans. Battalion Headquarters was near Brigade Headquarters. (For detailed dispositions see Sketch Map V.) The Battalion's rôle was to hold some old defensive works in the area, as a second line of defence, or to counter attack—several counter-attacks having been planned to meet different eventualities.


KEY:
○ 1st Foresters
↖ - - {Genral direction of German advance
• • • • • Perimeter.
NOTE:- Locality marked D(A/T) was only occupied by Coy H.Q., as all A/T guns were distributed to other Coys
Sketch Map V
TOBRUK
(1st Battalion)
Evening 20 th June 1942
MEDITERRANEAN
N
TOBRUK
1 WORCESTER
2 S. AFRICAN DIVISION
1 FORESTERS
3.CG
D (AT)
B
C
A
KINGS CROSS
Bde and Bn H.Q. area
11. IND. BDE
Beer Group
2 Camerons
Scale:-
1 0 1 2 3 MILES

The enemy attack started at 5.20 a.m. (sunrise) on the 20th June with a very heavy air bombardment, followed almost at once by intense artillery fire, directed mainly on the forward Infantry defences of the 11th Indian Brigade; but also on reserve areas, including that occupied by the Foresters. The initial German assault and penetration of the forward defences was made by the 15th Rifle Regiment, exploitation being carried out by the 21st (right) and 15th (left) Panzer Divisions, moving in a North-Westerly direction.

By 9 a.m. a substantial number of tanks of both Panzer Divisions had crossed the anti-tank ditch. By 12 noon enemy tanks were approaching King's Cross and the positions held by the 1st Foresters. At about 1 p.m. the Battalion was informed that a counter-attack planned by the 32nd Army Tank Brigade and the 3rd Coldstream Guards had been delayed (actually it never materialized). About the same time B Company was moved, from its central position in rear, out to the left flank.

It was now clear that a deep penetration had been made and that the situation was critical. The enemy advance was rapid and by 2 p.m. Rommel himself was at King's Cross and must have been overlooking the ground held by the Foresters.

By about 1.30 p.m. all communications, except by runner, had broken down, and from 2 p.m. onwards the fighting was confused in the extreme.

By 5.15 p.m. the forward companies of the Foresters had been completely overrun. The seven remaining anti-tank guns (which had started the day short of ammunition) were too thin on the ground to stop the advancing tanks. By 6 p.m. the Battalion had suffered very heavy casualties and was surrounded. At about this time a white flag appeared over Brigade Headquarters, which was slightly in advance of the Foresters' Headquarters.

As far as the Battalion was concerned there was no formal capitulation. With the overrunning of their forward companies, and the presence of German armour in, and all round, the position, cohesion was lost. The Battalion disintegrated and its personnel were either killed or captured piecemeal.

It is important to remember that being motorized, the Battalion was not designed by organization or establishment to hold ground against a major assault. Its transport, amounting to some 100 vehicles and drivers, was hidden in a rear area. Its communications in those days were largely tied to the sets in the vehicles, and in the ground rôle were inadequate.

The inner mine field, parallel with the Pilastrino Ridge, upon which the Battalion had relied in its defensive positions, proved in the event to have been denuded of mines to thicken up the Gazala defences some months earlier—this fact was not known at the time to the Garrison Commander of Tobruk or to the units of 201 Guards Brigade. Bn. HQ was in fact overrun by five enemy MK IV tanks which drove through the supposed minefield.

The South African Official History* states: '15th Panzer received the surrender of the Guards Brigade on the Ridge in the late afternoon.' At 1900 hrs. 21st Panzer Division announced the capture of the Port of Tobruk, and on the morning of the 21st June the entire garrison of Tobruk surrendered.

So the survivors of the 1st Bn. The Sherwood Foresters found themselves prisoners of war after their first serious engagement in World War II. By the 30th June Lieut-Colonel Edwards and all members of the Battalion who were on courses, or otherwise not at Tobruk, had collected at Geneifa in Egypt, prior to returning to the United Kingdom. Later, on 1st January 1943, at Great Yarmouth, the 1st

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* *Crisis in The Desert*, by J. A. I. Agar-Hamilton and L. C. F. Turner, page 183.

Battalion was to be resuscitated (by conversion of the 16th Battalion) and to serve for the rest of the war at home.

Summarized it can be said that there were two reasons for the failure to hold Tobruk—firstly the troops defending the perimeter were too thin on the ground (some Battalions held fronts of over three miles) and secondly the bulk of the reserves had been hastily assembled from units who had already had a severe hammering with the main body of the Eighth Army further West. They had insufficient time to settle in and plan their action properly.

CHAPTER 7

SINGAPORE AND CAPTIVITY

October 1941 to August 1945

(See Sketch Map VI)

I. SINGAPORE

We left the 1/5th Foresters having just returned from France in June 1940.* Soon after that they joined the 55th Brigade (Brigadier T. H. Massy-Beresford) of the 18th Division (Major-General M. Beckwith-Smith) and remained part of Home Forces until the autumn of 1941. The other Battalions in the 55th Brigade were the 5th Bn. The Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire Regiment and the 1st Bn. The Cambridgeshire Regiment.

On the 7th December 1941 the Japanese attacked the United States base at Pearl Harbour and simultaneously began the invasion of British, American and Dutch territories in the Pacific and South-East Asia. Command of the sea and air in the area passed temporarily to the Japanese and by the Spring of 1942 we, and our Allies, were to be stripped of all our possessions in that part of the world.

One of the first countries to be invaded was Malaya where the Japanese landed in the North, worked their way South and then assaulted the Island of Singapore. The story of the 1/5th Bn. The Sherwood Foresters in the defence of Singapore is told in this chapter.

The 18th Division convoy—bound for the Middle-East via the Cape route—left the United Kingdom at the end of October 1941, the 1/5th Foresters sailing from Liverpool in the Orient liner *Orchades*. In mid-Atlantic the convoy was met by ships of the United States Navy, and under their escort reached Halifax, Nova Scotia, on the 6th November. There the Battalion transferred to the U.S. transport *America* (formerly *West Point*), this being the first American troopship to carry British personnel in World War II. The amenities were not very good, the ship being crowded and the canteen facilities poor (and 'dry'). The Officers and crew did not display that degree of friendliness which later became such a feature of Anglo-American relations.

The next stop was Trinidad and then Cape Town. There they stayed for three days, leaving on the 13th December. In the meantime Japan had entered the war and soon after leaving Cape Town the convoy was diverted—the 53rd Brigade direct to Singapore and the rest of the 18th Division to India. The 1/5 Foresters disembarked at Bombay on the 27th December, and then went to the Ahmednagar area where they remained until mid-January 1942. Leaving Bombay on the 19th January they arrived at Singapore on the 29th. The voyage was without incident, except for an unsuccessful Japanese air attack on the convoy as it was approaching Singapore.

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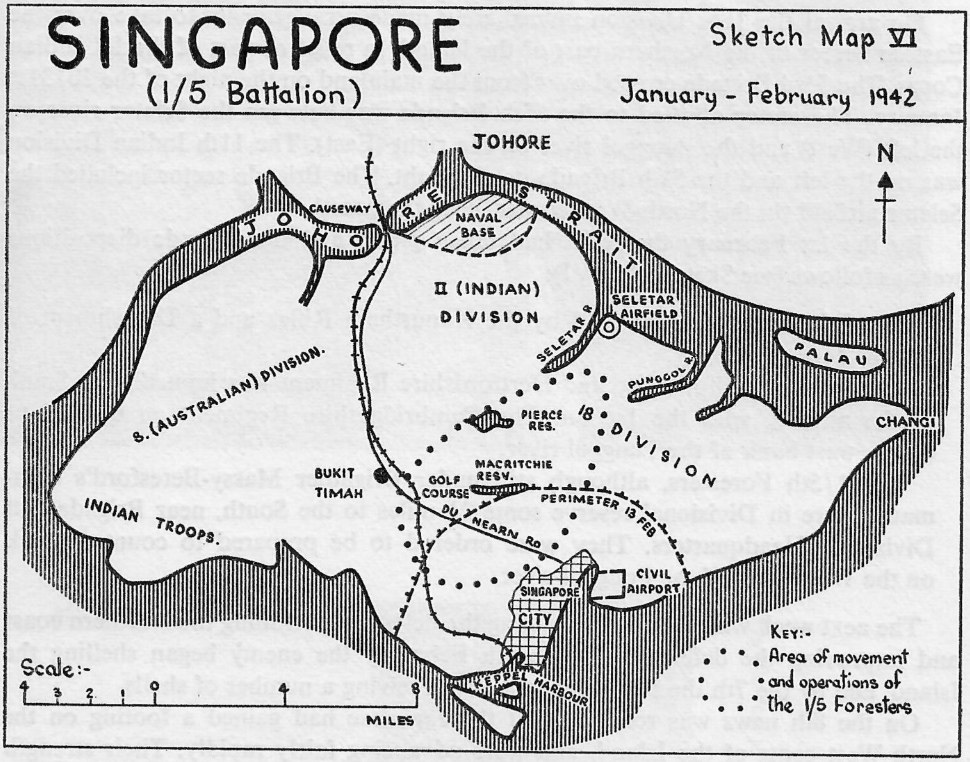
* See Chapter 4.


SINGAPORE
(1/5 Battalion)
Sketch Map VI
January - February 1942
JOHORE
N
JOHORE STRAIT
CAUSEWAY
NAVAL BASE
II (INDIAN) DIVISION
SELETAR AIRFIELD
SELETAR R.
PALAU
PUNGGOL R.
CHANGI
8. (AUSTRALIAN) DIVISION.
PIERCE RES.
18 DIVISION
BUKIT TIMAH
MACRITCHIE RESV.
GOLF COURSE
PERIMETER 13 FEB
DU NEARN RD
INDIAN TROOPS.
CIVIL AIRPORT
SINGAPORE CITY
KEPPEL HARBOUR
Scale:-
4 3 2 1 0 4 8
MILES
Key:-
Area of movement and operations of the 1/5 Foresters

By this time a serious, although not as yet critical, situation existed at Singapore. British and Indian troops on the Malayan mainland had been driven south and many units had suffered very heavily. The total evacuation of the mainland had now been decided on and the last troops—including the 53rd Brigade, which it will be remembered came on ahead of the rest of the 18th Division—were in process of moving on to the Island, after which the causeway connecting Singapore with the mainland was to be blown up.

The troops available to define the Island were:

III Indian Corps, consisting of the 11th Indian Division and the remnants of the 9th Indian Division which had suffered very heavy casualties on the mainland.

8th Australian Division (two Infantry Brigades only).

18th Division.

Other troops amounting numerically to the equivalent of a division.

The total strength was about 85,000 men, many of whom were non-combatants and only about 70,000 of whom were armed and equipped. Very little had been done to put the Island's defences in order, morale was low owing to the defeats on the mainland and the realization that the Japanese had secured command of the sea and air. To add to the commander's anxieties there was a large native population to be fed and controlled.

On arrival the 18th Division immediately made arrangements to take over the Eastern Sector of the Northern part of the Island, in relief of part of the III Indian Corps. The 53rd Brigade crossed over from the mainland on the night of the 30/31st January. The sector allotted to the 55th Brigade was between the Seletar river on the left (West) and the Punggol river on the right (East). The 11th Indian Division was on the left and the 54th Brigade on the right. The Brigade sector included the Seletar airfield (in the North-West corner, near the coast).

By the 1st February the relief had taken place, and the Brigade dispositions were as follows (see Sketch Map VI):

The Seletar airfield was held by the Kapurthala Rifles and a Detachment of the 3rd Indian Cavalry.

The 5th Bn. Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire Regiment was immediately South of the airfield, with the 1st Bn. The Cambridgeshire Regiment on their right on the west bank of the Punggol river.

The 1/5th Foresters, although still under Brigadier Massy-Beresford's command, were in Divisional reserve some 2½ miles to the South, near Brigade and Divisional Headquarters. They were ordered to be prepared to counter-attack on the West bank of the Punggol river.

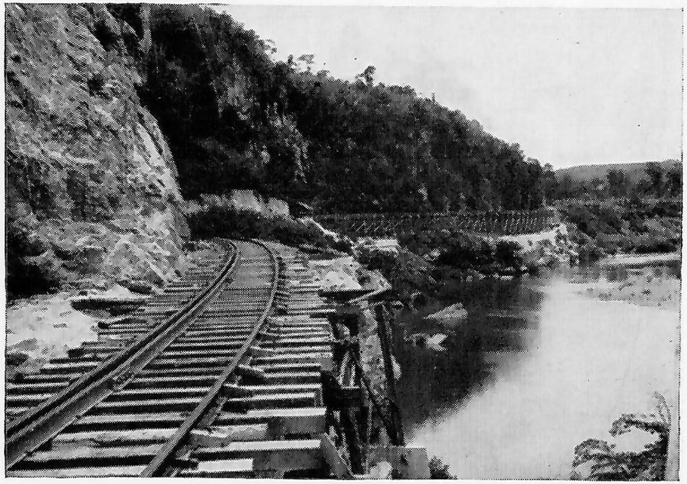
The next week was spent in organizing the defences, patrolling the Northern coast and improving the defences. On the 5th February the enemy began shelling the Island, and by the 7th the Foresters area was receiving a number of shells.

On the 8th news was received that the Japanese had gained a footing on the North-West coast of the Island, and were advancing fairly rapidly. Their strength was estimated at two Battalions. On the following day, however, Brigadier Massy-Beresford recorded that he felt quite confident about his own sector of the defences.

On the 10th February the Foresters were ordered to move that evening to the junction of Syme and Lornie roads to the North of Singapore City. This rendezvous, which was slightly altered later, was the assembly place for a force known as 'Tom Force', composed as follows:

Commander:	Lieut-Colonel L. C. Thomas, O.C., 9th Bn. Royal Northumberland Fusiliers (Divisional Machine-gun Battalion)
Troops:	18th Bn. Reconnaissance Corps 4th Bn. Royal Norfolk Regiment 1/5th Bn. Sherwood Foresters One Bty. 85th Anti-Tank Regiment

It was intended that this force should form a reserve, but that night (the 10th) it



The Burma Railway, 1942
The Wampo South Bridge where British prisoners of war worked

Singapore, 1942
The late Lieut-Colonel H. H. Lilly, O.B.E., T.D., commanding the 5th Battalion, during a lull in the Battle for Singapore

took up positions facing West astride the Dunearn road and about four miles West of Singapore City. The Foresters were to the South of the road with the Norfolks on their right. The 18th Reconnaissance Battalion was in reserve, but with patrols out in front towards Bukit Timar.

The Foresters were disposed with B Company on the right in the area where the pipe line crossed the road: C on the left on the summit of a small hill: D behind C on the reverse slope of the hill and A Company in reserve. On the night of the 11/12th February 'Tom Force' became part of Brigadier Massy-Beresford's command.

On the 12th 'Tom Force' advanced from its positions with a view to clearing the area towards Bukit Timar; but it made little headway, although it made contact with Australian troops holding the area further West. At 5 p.m. it withdrew, under orders, to approximately its original positions and then came under the orders of Headquarters, 54th Brigade.

By this time the situation was critical. The initial Japanese landings had been reinforced and tanks had made their appearance. It was decided to form a perimeter round Singapore City, about three miles from its outskirt (see Sketch Map No. VI), to which all troops were to withdraw. As the 1/5th Foresters were already located on the North-West edge of this perimeter they remained approximately where they were.

On the 14th small parties of selected Officers and Other Ranks from each unit (on the basis of one individual per rank) were sent into Singapore for evacuation.

Up to this time no actual attack had been launched by the enemy against any of the 18th Division's positions; but by the morning of the 15th many individuals and small parties of Japanese had infiltrated through the defences to the very outskirts of the City. Snipers were reported to be everywhere. Meanwhile the Foresters had made some adjustments to their positions; half the Battalion was now North of the Dunearn road, to the South-West of the golf course, and the other half to the South of the road.

Towards noon it became increasingly clear to senior officers that the situation was hopeless, and the end very near. During the afternoon orders were issued for a 'cease-fire' at 4 p.m., but there was a hitch in the arrangements and it did not come into force until 8.30 p.m.

In this manner the 1/5th Bn. The Sherwood Foresters, who had hardly played any part in the fighting, and were so confident of their ability to hold their positions if attacked, had no alternative but to participate in the general surrender and accept captivity for 3½ years.

This is the dismal story of the campaign in Malaya and Singapore—perhaps the greatest defeat in our history. It can hardly be denied that there were mistakes, and lack of drive, in the higher conduct of operations; but the basic cause was lack of modern equipment—particularly aircraft—and troops trained to the conditions of the country. The pressing needs of Europe and the Middle East, where we were fighting for our lives, left little to spare for the Far East—a probable theatre of war, but not an actual one until the 7th December 1941.

II. CAPTIVITY

The treatment of prisoners of war is one of the anomalies of history. The standard of civilization or culture of the captors seems to have little bearing on their behaviour towards their prisoners. Savages normally murder or torture them: yet, there are many instances where they have treated prisoners well for no apparent reason.

In the Middle Ages, the Armies of Christian nations often treated those who fell into their hands with great brutality, although exceptions were frequently made in the case of distinguished prisoners—who were usually held to ransom.

In modern times there are many instances of the very worst treatment of prisoners by captor nations claiming a high standard of civilization. In the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–5 the Japanese earned a high reputation for the treatment of their prisoners—a reputation they completely forfeited in World War II, when they treated some of their captives with the utmost callousness and unbelievable brutality.

(The brief account of the captivity which follows has been compiled from notes supplied by Lieut-Colonel G. S. Aspdin, T.D., who was a junior officer in the Battalion at Singapore and at the time of writing is commanding the 5th Bn. The Sherwood Foresters.)

The surrender of Singapore on the 15th February 1942 came as a complete surprise to the 1/5th Foresters. The Battalion had only been on the Island 14 days, it had seen very little fighting and was confident of its ability to give a good account of itself. When, at about 3.0 p.m. on that day, information of a surrender was announced from Divisional Headquarters, everyone was stunned and many men wept.

For two days the Battalion remained where it was and it was some time before any considerable number of Japanese were seen. Eventually orders came to march to Changi, at the Eastern tip of the Island. It was stated that only one vehicle was to be taken, but that part of the order was fortunately disobeyed and the Foresters managed to get a fair amount of personal kit and equipment into their first prison camp.

In Changi began the rice diet which was to last for 3½ years. The effect of the sudden change of food, together with battle weariness, was to make everyone extremely sleepy.

During this early sorting out period the Commanding Officer, Lieut-Colonel Harold Lilly, made most strenuous efforts to trace every Forester. All accounts and reports go to show that Lieut-Colonel Lilly's concern for his men at this time, and throughout the captivity, was one of the main reasons for the high morale maintained by Foresters while in Japanese hands.*

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* Lieut-Colonel H. H. Lilly, O.B.E., T.D., died in October 1954.

Parties of about 500 men each from Changi were called for periodically by the Japanese, to move into various camps in Singapore for cleaning up duties. These usually consisted of men from a number of British units. In the case of the Foresters, Lieut-Colonel Lilly always managed to send an officer of the Regiment with each party.

After about six months on Singapore Island prisoners were moved, in parties of about 1000 each, by train to Ban Pong (near Bangkok in Siam). Lieut-Colonel Lilly, with about five officers and from 200 to 300 men of the Foresters, was in one of the first parties to go. This move was preliminary to starting work on the Burma–Siam railway, which the Japanese were surveying and which they intended should be the chief supply line for their forces in Burma. It was from camps on this railway—about 300 miles long—that the bulk of the British prisoners from Singapore worked. The river ran parallel, and close to, the railway. Cholera, dysentery and malaria were common and there was a heavy sick and death rate. Many Foresters found their last resting place along the route of the Burma–Siam railway.

The first place to which Foresters moved was Wampo, about 100 miles West of Bangkok. This was just a spot in the jungle, but the prisoners stayed there for some months. By the time they left they had become experts at improvisation—mainly the improvisation of accommodation.

Later the British were joined by Australian and Dutch prisoners and ultimately by Tamils, Malays and other Asiatics. It was the latter who brought cholera and other epidemic diseases, and it was found very difficult to ensure compliance with even the most elementary measures of sanitation and field hygiene.

Three years went by during which the Foresters worked on the railway, or on accommodation or some other project directly connected with it. The Battalion became very much split up and the various parties moved frequently. During this time many prisoners got news from the outside world by means of clandestine wireless sets. The party to which Lieutenant Aspdin belonged had one built into a water bottle and about once a week were able to listen in to Radio Delhi. Right up to the end this party knew what was happening in various theatres of war all over the world.

By June 1945 the Japanese had separated the officers from their men. Some of the former were sent to Japan, but others—including some Forester officers—were marched to the Thai–Indo-China border. They had serious apprehensions as to what their fate was to be. Fortunately the speed with which Japan collapsed saved the situation and the prisoners were returned very quickly. As Lieutenant Aspdin put it: 'Evacuation by air to Rangoon and thence by sea to England was completed with the skill and precision that led to the success of so many other operations at the close of the war.'

The toll among the Foresters during the 3½ years of captivity was a heavy one. 450 officers and men of the Battalion were killed by the Japanese or died of disease or debility through overwork.

CHAPTER 8

THE LIBERATION OF AFRICA—EL ALAMEIN AND TUNISIA

September 1942 to May 1943

(See Sketch Maps VII and VIII)

After the defeats of the first half of 1942, changes were made in the higher command in the Middle East. General Sir Harold Alexander succeeded General Sir Claud Auchinleck as Commander-in-Chief, Middle East and Lieut-General Sir Bernard Montgomery took over command of the Eighth Army.

In early September 1942 the Eighth Army defeated a German-Italian attack at Alam Halfa and on the 23rd October 1942 took the offensive at El Alamein. Tobruk was recaptured on the 13th November and Benghazi taken on the 20th.

Meanwhile, on the 8th November, 1500 miles to the West, British and American Forces—under the command of the American General Eisenhower—had landed in French North Africa (Operation 'Torch'), and were advancing towards Bizerta and Tunis. Five months later these forces and the Eighth Army were to join up and by May 1943 the whole of Africa had been liberated.

Chapter 6 told the tale of the 1st Battalion's participation in the general capitulation at Tobruk in June 1942. We now come to the story of three other Forester Battalions—the 14th, 2/5th and the 2nd, one of whom during the latter part of 1942 and the other two during the first half of 1943, fought in North Africa in happier circumstances. In the operations which completed the liberation of Africa the 2nd and 2/5th Battalions served with the First Army in Tunisia and the 14th with the Eighth Army based on Egypt.

14th Battalion

The 14th Bn. The Sherwood Foresters (originally raised as the 50th Battalion in the summer of 1940, and converted to the 14th in October of the same year) spent the first two years of its existence in the United Kingdom, at first at Markeaton Park, Derby—where the conversion from 50th to 14th took place—and later in Yorkshire, Berkshire and Surrey. The Battalion was part of the 8th Armoured Division.

On the 1st May 1942, on the village green at Cranleigh in Surrey, together with other units of the 8th Armoured Division, the 14th Foresters were inspected by His Majesty King George VI. Four days later the baggage party moved off to Scotland and on the 7th the rest of the Battalion entrained at Godalming Station. By 6 p.m. on the 8th the Foresters had embarked at Gourock on the United States Ship *Orizaba*, and on the 10th the convoy sailed.

The unit was bound for the Middle East, but at that time the Naval situation in the Mediterranean was bad and convoys were forced to make the long trip round the Cape—except for occasional specially escorted convoys which made the hazardous journey to reinforce and supply Malta.

In spite of its variety and generous size British soldiers did not greatly appreciate the American ration. Coffee instead of tea was regarded as a real hardship and the 'tin and packet' system was not popular. They were not impressed by the high calorific value of food which many regarded as too unpalatable to eat!

The convoy reached Durban on the 9th June, where the Foresters spent five days living in a textile factory on the outskirts of the city. There the Battalion made many new friends, and judged themselves lucky to spend these few days at this South African seaside resort at the height of the holiday season. All ranks were most appreciative of the exceptional kindness shown by the staff of Messrs. Dunlops Ltd., whose premises were next door to their quarters.

The convoy put to sea again on the 15th June. As it approached Aden it received orders to split, and that portion containing the *Orizaba* made for Bombay. The reason for this move was not clear, but in the event the ship arrived at Bombay on the 1st July, stayed there for five days and then doubled back to the Red Sea and finally berthed at Suez on the 18th July 1942, having covered some 16,000 miles since leaving Scotland 2½ months before. It was a long and costly business to produce an operational British unit on a battlefield in North Africa.

At this time our affairs in the Middle East were at their lowest ebb. Commonwealth forces in the Western Desert had been driven back beyond the frontiers of Egypt, Tobruk had surrendered, our communications through the Mediterranean were cut and the redoubtable General Rommel was threatening Cairo and the Nile Delta.

On the day following disembarkation the Battalion moved to a camp at Tahag, near Quasassin, and was immediately ordered to reorganize as a Motor Battalion. On completion of this reorganization the Officer state was as follows:

Commanding Officer	Lieut-Colonel A. Andrews
2nd-in-Command	Major A. H. Gardner
Adjutant	Captain A. V. Cooper
Company Commanders:	
A	Major H. W. King
B	Captain C. F. Keeling
C	Major D. D. Wallace
D	Major C. F. Bleck
HQ	Captain V. G. P. Brough

As a Motor Battalion the 14th Foresters was fully mobile, with 16 Medium Machine-guns and 10 Anti-tank guns. At first each Company had one Platoon of 4 Medium Machine-guns and one of 2 (6 pr.) Anti-tank guns—except B Company whose Anti-tank Platoon was equipped with 4 2-pr. guns. Later the Anti-tank guns were concentrated into four Platoons of D Company.

After an exercise which took place from the 5th to the 8th August the Battalion left the 8th Armoured Division and joined the 9th Armoured Brigade Group (Brigadier J. C. Currie). The other units in the Brigade were all Armoured—the 3rd Hussars, the Royal Wiltshire Yeomanry and the Warwickshire Yeomanry.

On the 12th August a move was made to Fayid. Here the accommodation was very bad, there being no tents and only six huts. Fortunately the stay was a short one and on the 22nd the Battalion moved by train to Amyria, just South of Alexandria, and from there to a location in the desert a short distance away. Shortly after this Rommel made his unsuccessful attack at Alam Halfa. The Battalion took no part in the battle, but was close enough to be kept fully informed of its progress.

September was spent training under the new organization and with the new weapons. A good deal of shooting was carried out on improvised ranges. On the last day of the month the 14th Foresters were inspected by General Montgomery, the Eighth Army Commander.

After the defeat at Alam Halfa, in early September, of Rommel's bid for Cairo and the Nile Delta, General Montgomery made energetic preparations for an offensive of his own, a battle which was to be the turning point of the war—El Alamein.

The battle opened on the 23rd October 1942 and until the 31st consisted of a hard slogging match. The 14th Foresters did not play a conspicuous part in this stage.* Theirs was a waiting rôle behind the armour, mopping-up and guarding prisoners. Many short moves made rest impossible and the Battalion was under frequent shell fire.

By the 1st November the Infantry and Armour of the Eighth Army, supported by a great weight of Artillery and Aircraft, had advanced several thousand yards through heavily defended minefields and wire entanglements. Several counter-attacks had been beaten off with heavy losses to the enemy. At this stage General Montgomery judged that one more blow would complete the defeat of the Africa Corps. The artillery had by now been moved forward and all was in readiness. The task of delivering the final punch was entrusted to the 2nd New Zealand Division with the 151st and 152nd Infantry Brigades and the 9th Armoured Brigade Group under its Command. The attack was to take place between El Rahman in the North and the Miteiriya Ridge in the South, in an area about ten miles from the coast.

For this battle one Company and one Anti-tank Platoon of the 14th Foresters was attached to each of the three Armoured Regiments. Battalion Headquarters was to move with Headquarters 9th Armoured Brigade.

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* The War Diary of the Battalion for October 1942 is missing from the official records, and it appears that none was kept or that all copies were lost. The Diary for November has been consulted but is very brief.

The attack of the Infantry Brigades began at five minutes past midnight on the 1/2nd November and was quickly successful. By 5.45 a.m. the Armoured Regiments of the 9th Armoured Brigade Group had reached the Infantry objectives and began to push on over the El Rahman track. Thereafter a most violent and confused tank battle ensued. Little news reached Brigade Headquarters or the Foresters Headquarters, which were under constant shell fire and were also bombed. Lieut. J. F. Curtis, the Battalion Signal Officer, was killed by shell fire during the morning.

It is impossible to describe in detail the action of the Foresters' Companies, which in some cases were unable to keep up with the armour and became involved in isolated engagements in a mass of confused fighting. All the Armoured Regiments suffered very heavily, the Royal Wiltshire Yeomanry being practically annihilated. B Company and the Anti-tank Platoon of the Foresters, who were attached to this Regiment, greatly distinguished themselves when the tanks they were supporting had all been knocked-out. The Company Commander had become a casualty, but the Company 2nd-in-command, Captain R. M. Dick, organized a defensive area in which he incorporated some Anti-tank guns of other units and held the position until after dark, when he was ordered to withdraw. A very fine piece of work.

At about 7.30 that evening Brigade and Battalion Headquarters moved some 3 miles to the North-East; but Colonel Andrews still had no very clear idea of how his Companies had fared, or where they were located. It was not until the evening of the 3rd October that an assessment could be made. By then the Battalion had arrived at Tel El Eisa Station. 1 Officer (Lieut. A. M. Rosenbaum) had been killed and 6 wounded; 8 Other Ranks were killed, 44 wounded and 13 were missing.

By this time, however, enemy resistance had cracked, and Axis forces were withdrawing from Egypt for the last time. Although Rommel had suffered a crushing defeat, General Montgomery was denied the full fruits of his victory by the heavy rain which followed, and turned the desert into a quagmire. This made movement by both track and wheeled vehicles very difficult and often impossible.

At 11.30 a.m. on the 4th the Battalion—reduced to two-Company strength by casualties and because some detachments had not yet joined up—began to move forward and continued to do so, with only short periods of rest, until the evening of the 6th. The night of the 6/7th was spent just South of the coast road about 15 miles West of Fuka. It was at this stage that the weather intervened. Heavy rain fell that night and no supply vehicles were able to reach the 14th Foresters. The Battalion had run out of petrol and, as all supplies that *did* arrive were given to the armour, they were immobilized.

They were still awaiting the supply vehicles on the following day and the rest of the Brigade—or what was left of it after its heavy losses—moved on, leaving the Foresters to catch up later. On the 9th they got hold of three vehicles loaded with petrol and oil and, with their fuel tanks replenished, began to move West again at 11.30 a.m. Unfortunately after dark the column struck the edge of a minefield and a vehicle was badly damaged.

On the 10th the Battalion caught up with the rest of the Brigade, and at 5 p.m. had arrived in an area about 8 miles South-East of Sidi Barrani.

By this time the enemy was well on the run and a special pursuit force was organized. This force, of one Armoured and two Infantry Divisions, was only a fraction of the whole Eighth Army, the bulk of which was temporarily left behind. Those formations which had suffered heavy losses were sent further back to rest and refit.

The 9th Armoured Brigade Group fell into this category and on the 12th November began its Eastward move. On that day it moved some 76 miles to West of Mersa Matruh, and remained in that area for several days. A long move of 156 miles along the coast road to El Imayid Staging Camp was made on the 21st, and another 139 miles was covered on the 22nd. This brought them to Cowley in the Nile Delta, and may be said to have ended the 14th Sherwood Foresters part in the North African campaign. They were to serve in several other parts of the Middle East, and in several different formations, before embarking for their second and last campaign, in Italy, more than a year later.

2/5th Battalion (redesignated '5th Battalion' on 1st January, 1943)

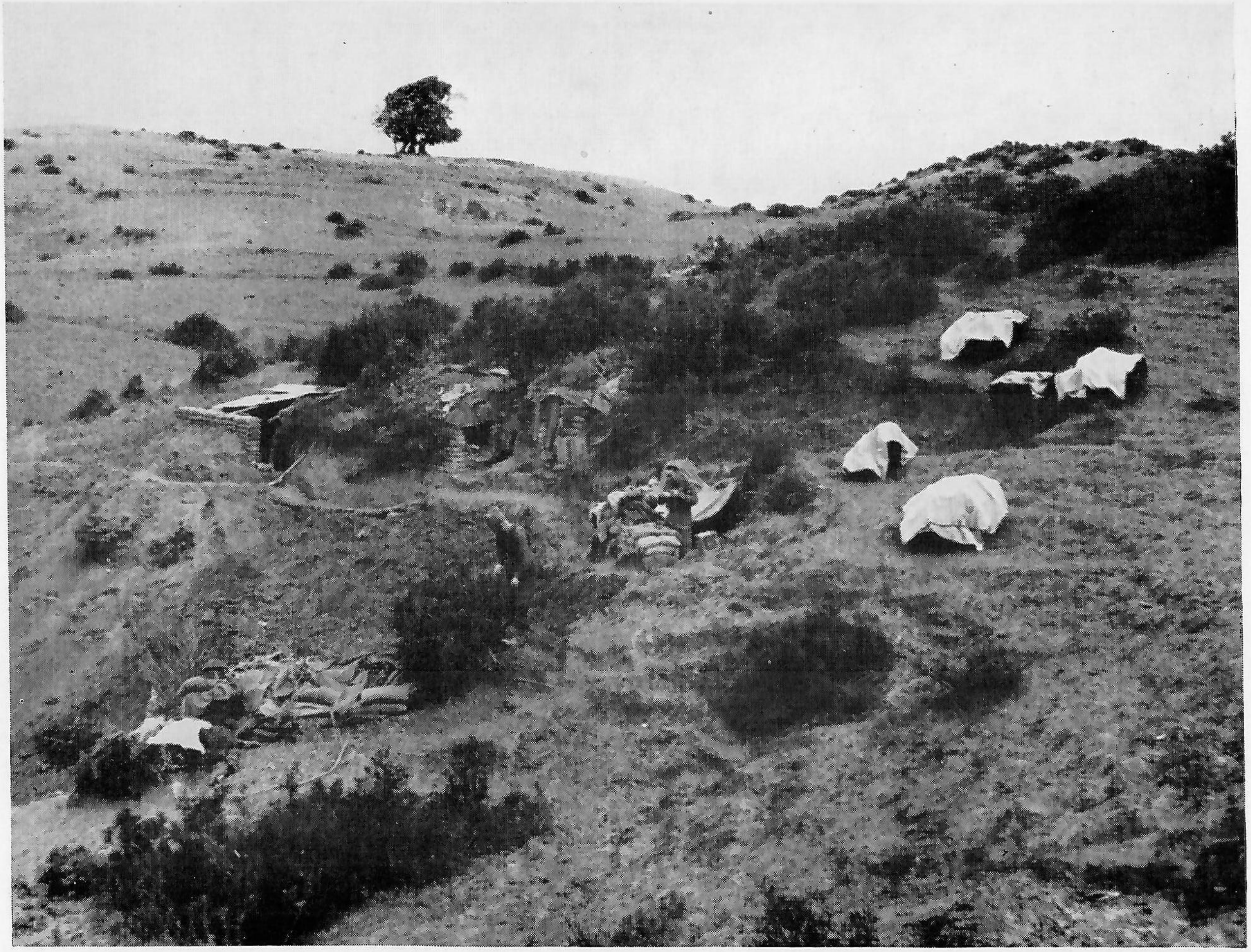
On its return from France in June 1940 the 2/5th Foresters served in Scotland until January 1941, when it moved to East Anglia and later to Kent where it was stationed at Hawkhurst, New Romney and Folkestone.

The 2/5th sailed from the Clyde in December 1942, in the ship appropriately named *Derbyshire*, bound for North Africa.

The circumstances in which British and American forces came to French North Africa in November 1942 have been mentioned earlier. By the beginning of January 1943, when the 2/5th Foresters arrived, the situation was not entirely satisfactory. The French had stopped fighting, but were squabbling among themselves and with the British and Americans. The French High Commissioner, Admiral Darlan, had been assassinated on Christmas Eve. The Anglo-American advance eastwards had not been in sufficient strength to secure all their objectives before enemy reinforcements arrived in Tunisia from Italy. Allied troops were halted within an hour's drive of Tunis and Bizerta, but there was to be some bloody fighting before they entered those places. In the meantime General Montgomery's Eighth Army had entered Tobruk, Benghazi and El Aqheila, and was preparing to advance on Tripoli.

At this time the 2/5th Foresters were commanded by Lieut-Colonel R. E. H. Stott (who took over from Lieut-Colonel J. Hassell in May 1941), with Major A. D. McKechnie as 2nd-in-Command (followed soon after landing by Major C. A. W. Williamson) and Captain B. Keith-Lucas as Adjutant.

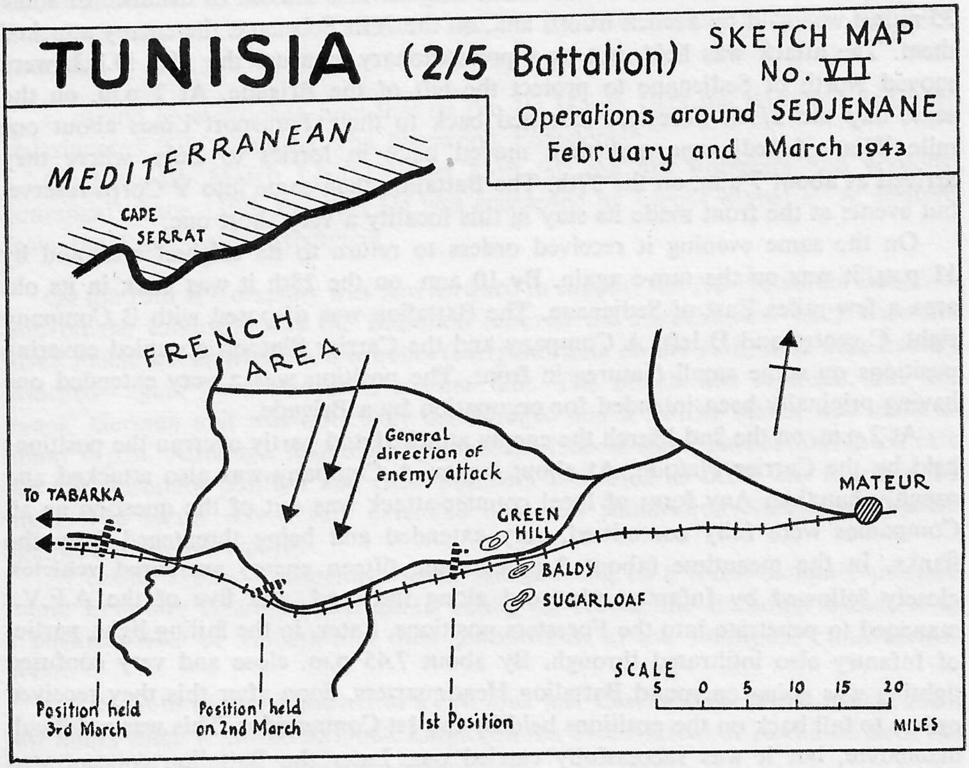
The Battalion was in the 139th Brigade (Brigadier R. C. Chichester-Constable)



North Africa, 1943
The 2/5th Battalion on the Sedjenane Front

of the 46th Division, and was brigaded with the 16th Bn. The Durham Light Infantry and the 2/5th Bn. The Leicestershire Regiment.

On the 1st January 1943 the convoy containing the *Derbyshire*, with the 2/5th Foresters on board, passed Gibraltar and on the 3rd berthed at Algiers. Disembarkation began at 6 p.m., but it was not until the early hours of the 4th that the Battalion completed its march to the Transit Camp at Gué de Constantine. There they remained until the evening of the 14th, when they entrained for a forward move, to take over a portion of the front from the 6th Bn. Royal West Kent Regiment.


TUNISIA (2/5 Battalion)
SKETCH MAP
No. VII
Operations around SEDJENANE
February and March 1943
MEDITERRANEAN
CAPE SERRAT
FRENCH AREA
General direction of enemy attack
To TABARKA
MATEUR
GREEN HILL
BALDY
SUGARLOAF
SCALE
5 0 5 10 15 20
MILES
Position held 3rd March
Position held on 2nd March
1st Position

The new area was in hilly country, the sector to be taken over being in the valley through which run the rail and road between Tabarka and Mateur. The other Battalions in the 139th Brigade were disposed with the 16th D.L.I. on the right and the 2/5th Leicesters in Reserve. French troops were on the left. Contact was not very close, the enemy being from 1000 to 2000 yards distant, their positions being known by the names 'Greenhill', 'Sugarloaf' and 'Baldy'.

The last part of the journey was carried out in lorries and by march route, and it was not until early on the 19th that the relief was completed.

Activities in this area were confined to patrolling, with frequent spells of very lively shell and mortar fire, which caused a steady drain of casualties. On the morning of the 4th February, while the Battalion Chaplain, the Rev. H. N. Barratt, was holding a Communion Service, the temporary Church hut was hit by a shell. 2/Lieut. J. S. Martin and Private J. Blake were killed instantly and the Padre died of his wounds two hours later.

The routine of static warfare continued—with frequent Company reliefs, but not relief of the Battalion as a whole—until the 22nd February, when the 2/5th handed over to a Commando unit and went to an area about 10 miles to the west, towards Sedjenane. Here they were occupied in preparing a defensive position, but were not in contact with the enemy.

The area between the left of the 139th Brigade and the sea (a distance of some 35 miles) was held by French troops and, on the 26th February, the enemy attacked them. The attack was held, but as a precautionary measure the 16th D.L.I. were moved North of Sedjenane to protect the left of the Brigade. At 7 p.m. on the same day the 2/5th Foresters marched back to their Transport Lines about one mile West of Sedjenane and then moved back in lorries to Beja, where they arrived at about 7 a.m. on the 27th. The Battalion then came into V Corps reserve, but events at the front made its stay in this locality a very short one.

On the same evening it received orders to return to its original area and by 11 p.m. it was on the move again. By 10 a.m. on the 28th it was back in its old area a few miles East of Sedjenane. The Battalion was disposed with B Company right, C centre and D left. A Company and the Carrier Platoon occupied covering positions on some small features in front. The position was a very extended one having originally been intended for occupation by a Brigade.

At 2 p.m. on the 2nd March the enemy attacked and partly overran the positions held by the Carrier Platoon. At about 4 p.m. A Company was also attacked and roughly handled. Any form of local counter-attack was out of the question as all Companies were fully committed, very extended and being threatened from the flanks. In the meantime (about 3 p.m.) some fifteen enemy armoured vehicles, closely followed by Infantry advanced along the road, and five of the A.F.V.s managed to penetrate into the Foresters positions. Later, in the failing light, parties of Infantry also infiltrated through. By about 7.45 p.m. close and very confused fighting was going on round Battalion Headquarters. Soon after this they received orders to fall back on the positions held by the 1st Commandos. This was a difficult manœuvre, but it was successfully carried out. Later the Battalion concentrated West of Tamera Station.

The morning of the 3rd found the 2/5th Foresters holding an Anti-tank locality West of Sedjenane, where they were heavily shelled and mortared. Later they withdrew under orders, through positions held by the Coldstream Guards, to another position overlooking Tamera Station.

On this day Captain C. Wall, commanding Headquarter Company, was severely wounded by a shell and died shortly after.

The following day the Battalion moved to another defensive position near the much bombed town of Djebel Abiod, where they laid mines and generally improved the defences. They remained in this area until the 12th March and then concentrated at Tamera Station in rear of the 3rd Parachute Battalion. This move was the preliminary to an attack on a feature on the right flank which the Foresters were to carry out the next day.

This attack was very hurriedly arranged and at the last minutes there was a hitch over the Artillery programme which caused some delay. The attack eventually started at 3.30 p.m. with B (right) and C (left) Companies leading, and D following closely behind. The ascent was very steep and difficult, and the men were very exhausted when they reached the summit after only slight opposition and no casualties. They were immediately fiercely counter-attacked from the reverse slope by a Battalion of Panzer Grenadiers and forced to abandon the hill. Orders were received that the attack was not to be renewed and the Battalion withdrew behind the Parachutists.

It should be mentioned here that on the 1st March 1943 the Battalion had been redesignated '5th Battalion The Sherwood Foresters.'*

On the 14th March Lieut-Colonel Stott left the 5th Foresters and assumed command of the 139th Brigade. He was succeeded by Lieut-Colonel E. A. Hefford from the Lincolnshire Regiment.

On the 15th A Company was sent forward to support the 3rd Parachute Battalion and on the following day the Battalion relieved the Parachutists. They were not given much rest as within a few hours (early morning on the 17th) they were heavily attacked—again by a Panzer Grenadier unit. The attack was repulsed, but this 'crack' German unit was not easily discouraged and a further attack was made at about 4 p.m. Although it had no spectacular success some parties infiltrated into the 5th Foresters position and their numbers increased as dusk was followed by night. The sector was a very extended one, and penetration difficult to prevent against determined troops.

At about 7 p.m. Companies began withdrawing to a more compact position round Battalion Headquarters. Later, acting on orders, the Battalion withdrew to a position West of Tamera and then concentrated at the Transport Lines further West.

On the 20th March it moved to a rest area just East of Beja where, except for a few hours when it moved to Oued Zarga (on the 29th March), it remained until the 15th April—resting, training and refitting.

The Battalion had experienced a strenuous time. It had been in action, or on the move in the battle area, almost continously for more than two months. Officers and men were new to the country and they suffered heavy casualties. The 5th Foresters acquitted themselves well and played a worthy part in defeating the last effort made by the Axis to retrieve their position in Africa.

During the first fortnight of April the Battalion remained in reserve. On 15th April they moved to Gafour. In the meantime, on the 7th April the Eighth Army had joined up with the Allies in Tunisia and elements of General Montgomery's men began arriving in the 5th Foresters' area on the 20th.

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* The change of designation was made in consequence of the capture of the 1/5th Foresters (known in pre-war days as the 5th Battalion) when the garrison of Singapore surrendered in February 1942. (See Chapter 7.)

The time had now come to deliver the final blow which was to throw the Axis forces out of Africa.

During the night of the 21/22nd April the Battalion moved up to an area East of the Bou Arada–Medjez Road. The 46th Division attacked on the morning of the 22nd with the 128th and 138th Brigades leading. The 139th Brigade was in reserve and did not become seriously engaged.

During the night of the 24/25th April it was discovered that the enemy, who had fought very stoutly on the front of the 128th Brigade, had withdrawn. Two Battalions—the 5th Foresters and the 2/5th Leicesters from the 139th Brigade—were ordered forward to capture a hill overlooking the Northern side of the Pont Du Fah road. The advance started in the dark, and by daylight the objective had been occupied without opposition. Assisted by some Churchill tanks the Battalion later repulsed a counter-attack, 24 members of the crack Herman Goering Panzer Grenadier Regiment remaining as prisoners in their hands. The Foresters stayed in the area until the 28th April when they were relieved by French troops. On the night of the 28/29th a very difficult and strenuous move was made to take over the area occupied by the 138th Brigade.

By the 7th May the enemy was retreating on all fronts. Allied Armour passed through and that evening news reached the Foresters that British troops had entered Tunis and that American and French units were about to enter Bizerta.

The Battalion spent the last week of the African campaign in a defensive position. Meantime British Armour had broken into the Cap Bon Peninsula and the Axis forces were in a state of disintegration. The German has a reputation for doing things one hundred per cent. The enemy who had fought so bravely only a few days before suddenly started surrendering 'en masse', and Allied troops witnessed one of the strangest sights in military history. Germans and Italians, driven in their own lorries by their own countrymen, came down the road in hundreds to the prisoner-of-war cages. On the 11th May Lieut. R. V. Hammond, the Quartermaster, offered a lift to some Germans on foot who were eager to surrender. He ended up with 17 in, and on, his 15-cwt. truck.

On the 13th May the last Axis forces in Africa surrendered.

On the 17th May Battalion Headquarters, B Company and most of Headquarter Company moved to Bararhine to form a Prisoners-of-War cage for German officers. By the 18th they had collected 257 Officer and 46 Other Rank prisoners and by the 24th the numbers had risen to 605 and 97 respectively.

During the first week in June 1943 the 5th Foresters concentrated at Hammam Lif to rest and prepare for the next task.

2nd Battalion

After its return from Dunkirk in June 1940 the 2nd Foresters spent more than 2½ years in the United Kingdom, at first in East Anglia but later in Scotland where they made two visits to Inverary in Argyllshire for training in combined operations.

Christmas 1942 found the Battalion at Crieff in Perthshire. Here a system of staggered embarkation leave, spread over a period of three months, was combined with training, although the excellent conditions afforded by that part of Scotland were in the winter hardly ideal as a preparation for a campaign in North Africa.

On the 24th February 1943 the Battalion entrained at Crieff for Avonmouth, where on the 26th they embarked on S.S. *Tamaroa*, which sailed for a secret destination on the following day. The Battalion was still in the 3rd Infantry Brigade of the 1st Division, its companion units in the Brigade being the same as at Dunkirk —1st Bn. The Duke of Wellington's Regiment and the 1st Bn. The King's Shropshire Light Infantry.

After a pleasant and uneventful journey the 2nd Foresters arrived at Algiers on the 9th March where they expected to disembark. Orders were changed, however, and the Battalion (less the Reinforcement Company which landed) went on to Bone, where they arrived about dusk on the 11th during a heavy air raid.

At this time the Commanding Officer was Lieut-Colonel R. T. K. Pye, with Major J. H. M. Hackett as 2nd-in-Command.

Meanwhile, as already described, Axis forces in North Africa were being pushed into the North-East corner of Tunisia, and the Cap Bon Peninsula, by General Eisenhower's troops advancing from the West and the British Eighth Army from Tripolitania.

At the time the 2nd Foresters disembarked the hardest fighting was in the area some 30 miles West of Tunis, where the enemy was resisting fiercely to prevent the capture of the town.

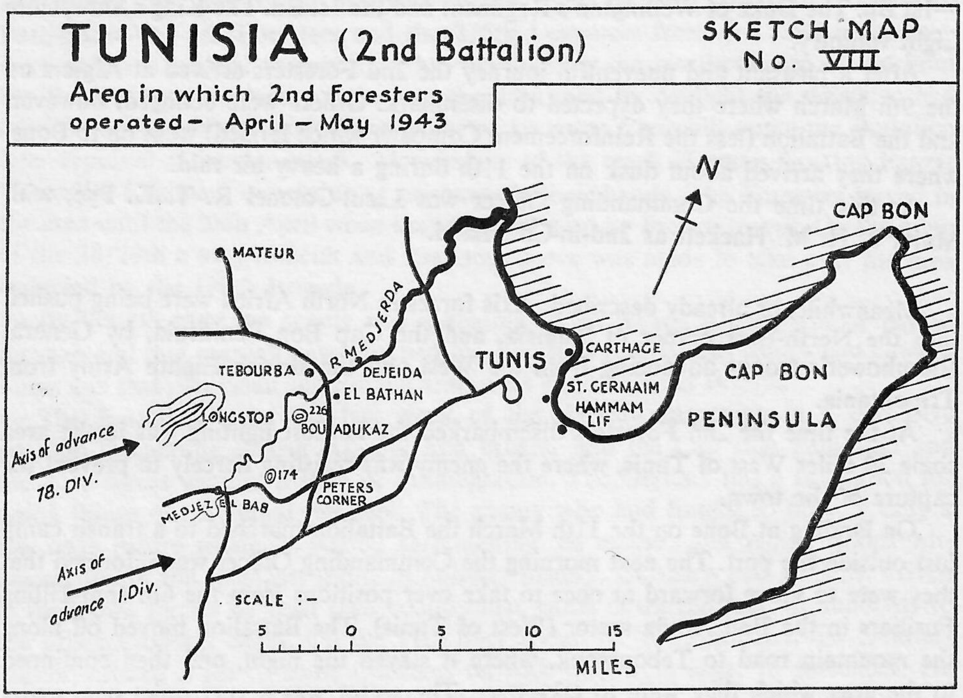
On landing at Bone on the 11th March the Battalion marched to a transit camp just outside the port. The next morning the Commanding Officer was informed that they were to move forward at once to take over positions from the 6th Inniskilling Fusiliers in the Bou Arada sector (West of Tunis). The Battalion moved off along the mountain road to Teboursouk, where it stayed the night, and then continued to the area which they were to take over. The sector was a very quiet one, under French command, and the month spent there proved a very useful prelude to the stiff fighting which was to follow. Companies were disposed astride the main road which ran south from Medjej-el-Bab. The positions were mostly on small hill features or in farm buildings. Patrolling was a feature of the stay in this area, two outstanding patrols into the enemy lines being carried out by Captain L. Slingsby (C Company) and Lieut. A. St. J. M. Brachi (D Company).

During this time preparations were in hand for the offensive against Tunis. This was facilitated by the link-up of the Allies in Tunisia and the Eighth Army from Libya, which took place on the 7th April and made it possible to transfer Divisions from the Eighth to the First Army for the coming offensive.

On the 19th April the 95th moved back through Teboursouk and round to the

Medjez area, where the 1st Division was to deliver an attack on to the high ground between the main Medjez–Tunis road and the River Medjerda, which were the Division's right and left boundaries respectively. Two features had to be captured, the first the line of the Djebel Rhouass and Point 174: the second a much bigger feature called Djebel Bou Akouaz (known as the 'Bou') about 3 miles further to the North-East.

On the left the 78th Division was to attack the formidable heights to the North of Medjej-El-Bab.


TUNISIA (2nd Battalion)
Area in which 2nd Foresters operated – April – May 1943
SKETCH MAP No. VIII
N
CAP BON
MATEUR
R. MEDJERDA
TUNIS
CARTHAGE
ST. GERMAIM
HAMMAM LIF
CAP BON PENINSULA
TEBOURBA
DEJEIDA
EL BATHAN
LONGSTOP
226
BOU ADUKAZ
174
PETERS CORNER
MEDJEZ EL BAB
Axis of advance 78. DIV.
Axis of advance 1. Div.
SCALE :–
5 0 5 10 15
MILES

The Divisional attack began on the 23rd April when the 1st (Guards) and 2nd Brigade met with limited success at heavy cost. Point 174 was captured and then lost when the enemy counter-attacked.

On the following day the 1st K.S.L.I. (left) and the 2nd Foresters (right) were ordered to attack Point 174 and an adjacent feature to its left. At 2 p.m. the 95th crossed the start line for their attack on Point 174—D (right) and B (left) Companies leading with A and C behind them. An intermediate feature, Point 151, was occupied in good style. At the foot of Point 174, however, they ran into wire and mines covered by heavy enemy artillery, mortar and machine-gun fire. This caused a hold-up, but after further support from the Divisional Artillery and Battalion Mortars the advance was resumed. Several gaps in the wire and minefield were made and the Battalion pushed its way up to the summit of Point 174. The final assault was led by Lieut-Colonel Pye in person. Conspicuous among the junior leaders was Lieut. Brachi (D Company) who during the advance engaged several enemy machine-gun posts single-handed. Unfortunately this gallant officer was killed during the final stages of the assault, whilst attempting to clear an enemy post on the summit of the hill. Lieut. John Hudson (son of Brigadier C. E. Hudson—a Forester who won the Victoria Cross in World War I) was also killed in this attack.

The Battalion was very much bothered by six German 'Tiger' tanks on the reverse side of the hill; but they withdrew at dusk, when the enemy artillery took over the task of annoying the Foresters.

The enemy made no further counter-attacks on Point 174 and for the next six days the Foresters maintained their position under heavy shell and mortar fire, patrolling vigorously towards the enemy. Major H. T. Astell was seriously wounded during this period.

The next phase of the advance included an attack by the Guards Brigade on 'The Bou', which was only partly successful. The enemy then made a very determined counter-attack to the right of 'The Bou'; but the front held firm, although there was very severe fighting. The Allies were now ready for a knock-out blow which was to lead them to the flat country around Tunis and give scope for the advance of the Armour. The final attack was to be made by the IX Corps along the line of the main Tunis road; but as a preliminary the 3rd Brigade was ordered to capture and hold the Bou Akouaz feature.

The 95th had moved on the 4th May to a lying-up position behind the Djebel Rhouass. The attack on 'The Bou' was carried out by the other two Battalions in the Brigade on the evening of the 5th May, the Foresters being in reserve. The forward Battalions secured their objectives on the summit in face of heavy fire and with heavy losses. Immediately the 95th sent two Companies to reinforce The Dukes on Point 226 on the left, and one to the K.S.L.I. on the right at Point 181. By dawn on the 6th the hill was firmly held.

Just before noon on the 7th came the good news that the enemy was retreating on all fronts and the 3rd Brigade was ordered to push straight on, cross the River Medjerda about El Bathan and interrupt the enemy withdrawal through Tebourba and Dejeida. Sending back their prisoners—of whom there were many—the Companies of the Foresters advanced over 'The Bou' and on for a long march to the river. The night of the 7/8th was spent lying-up in heavy rain just short of Dejeida. At 10.30 a.m. on the 8th the Battalion forded the River Medjerda and advanced on Dejeida. The town was occupied by some hundred Axis troops who surrendered after making a token resistance.

By this time the bulk of the retreating enemy had found their way on to the Cap Bon Peninsula. After two days around Dejeida the Battalion was moved to a Divisional concentration area some 30 miles to the South with the object of undertaking mopping-up operations on Cap Bon. Here the sight of thousands of defeated enemy troops marching, and driving their own vehicles, into the prisoner-of-war cages, told the Battalion that its job in Africa was over.

On the afternoon of the 13th May 1943 the code word 'Completion' was received, and hostilities came to an end. On the same day the 95th moved to the pleasant seaside resort of St. Germain, near Tunis, for a short period of rest.

So the 2nd and 5th Battalions of the Sherwood Foresters were in at the death in Tunisia. Now no enemy troops in arms remained in Africa. As Sir Winston Churchill put it at the time, 'One Continent redeemed.'

The Occupation of the Island of Pantellaria (2nd Battalion)

Events moved quickly in the Mediterranean area in May 1943. The Axis lost a great number of men in North Africa, and it was felt that it only wanted a little more pressure to knock Italy out of the war. The invasion of the Italian homeland became a pressing matter for the Allies.

As a preliminary to the assault on Sicily it was necessary to capture and occupy the Italian island of Pantellaria, situated some fifty miles East of Cap Bon and on the direct sea route to Sicily. As it turned out Pantellaria was not one of the toughest combined operations of the war; but it very well might have been. The fortress possessed a formidable array of coast defence artillery, and a garrison of 15,000 men well protected by natural caves and artificially constructed shelters.

Planning for the assault on the Island began at once. After little more than a week at St. Germain the 2nd Foresters moved 70 miles South to the port of Sousse. The 'softening up' of the Island had already started, and before the sea-borne assault was launched the defences were subjected to a month's heavy, and almost continuous, aerial bombardment. It was also bombarded by the Royal Navy. This caused the Luftwaffe to retaliate on Sousse, and nearly every night the harbour area was bombed.

We need not dwell too long on this bloodless victory. The initial assault was to be carried out by the 3rd Brigade, with the 95th forming the second wave ashore.

Much of the time at Sousse was spent in combined training, about which the debonair commanding officer of another unit in the Brigade wrote: '... Combined training is a racket; there is nothing in it. In spite of the efforts of the experts we soon taught the troops how to get themselves and their gear into a boat, and subsequently to transfer themselves as quickly as possible on to the beach. That is combined training ...'—a slight over-simplification perhaps!

On the 4th June a rehearsal took place in a very rough sea which, so it was said, made many people—including all the umpires—sick.

The Brigade convoy sailed from Sousse on the evening of the 9th during an unusually heavy enemy raid. Early the next morning Pantellaria—a pear-shaped island about eight miles long and five broad, with a high hill in the middle—hove in sight.

Just as it was getting light, and when the convoy was about four miles from the Island, the landing craft left the big ships and turned in formation towards the small port of Pantellaria itself. As they moved in one hundred Flying Fortresses passed overhead and dropped their loads on the harbour area. They were followed by many squadrons of 'Lightnings' and these machine-gunned and bombed tactical targets all over the Island.

When the landing craft were within a few hundred yards of the shore a white flag was seen fluttering from the Signal Station on the hill. Pantellaria was taken without a shot being fired in its defence. Thousands of prisoners soon began to come in, all with their kit packed in bags or parcels, and each man complete with his own white flag. Of the garrison of about 15,000 all were Italians except some 120 German technicians.

Two days later the 3rd Brigade was relieved by the 2nd Brigade, the former re-embarking for the Tunisian mainland, where a period of six months' mountain and other training awaited them in preparation for their greatest adventure—the Anzio landing.

It is recorded that the 2nd Foresters suffered only one casualty in the Pantellaria operation—Corporal Sanderson of the Carrier Platoon, who was bitten by a mule.

CHAPTER 9

ITALY—I

The Landing at Salerno, the Crossing of the Vulturno and the advance to the Garigliano June 1943 to February 1944

(See Sketch Maps IX and X)

After the liberation of Africa, Allied policy aimed at the conquest of Sicily, followed by the invasion of the Italian mainland. The purpose of these operations was to knock Italy out of the war and to draw as many German troops as possible to Southern Europe. The immediate object was to help the Russians, and the long-term one to create favourable conditions for the Anglo-American cross-Channel invasion of North-West Europe—at that time optimistically contemplated in the autumn of 1943, but in the event delayed until the summer of 1944.

The assault on Sicily started on the 10th July 1943 and by the 17th August the whole Island had been occupied and all enemy resistance had ceased. No Battalion of the Foresters took part in this campaign.

Axis reverses in Africa and Sicily resulted in a marked lowering of morale throughout Italy, and dissatisfaction with their own regime and their German masters. On the 25th July Mussolini 'resigned' under compulsion from the King, who assumed supreme command of the Italian forces. Marshal Badoglio became Prime Minister. Soon after this Italy began secret negotiations with the Allies for an Armistice.

The Allied plan was for General Montgomery's Eighth Army to assault the toe of Italy across the Straits of Messina, and for General Mark Clark's Fifth Army (composed of American and British Divisions) to land at Salerno Bay, some 40 miles below Naples. The two Armies were then to link up and capture Naples.

Operation 'Avalanche'—the first assault on the mainland of Hitler's 'Fortress Europe'—began on the 3rd September when the Eighth Army crossed the Straits of Messina and forced a landing in Southern Italy at Reggio-di-Calabria. Good progress was made and on the 10th September the second part of the plan was carried out, when the Fifth Army began landing at Salerno.

Meanwhile on the 3rd September—the day of the Eighth Army's landing—the Allies and the Italian government signed a military armistice, but this was not announced publicly until the 8th—two days before the Salerno landings.

This chapter describes the activities of the 5th Foresters, who took part in the Salerno operations as part of the 46th British Division in General Mark Clark's Fifth Army.

We left the 5th Battalion at Hammam Lif resting and refitting after the Axis surrender in Tunisia. On the 2nd June 1943, less than three weeks after the fighting ended, 8 Officers and some 400 Other Ranks of the Battalion lined the route between Tunis and Hammam Lif on the occasion of Mr. Churchill's visit. An eye-witness records that the Prime Minister was obviously in the highest spirits as he drove slowly between the ranks of the victorious troops, smiling, waving and giving the 'V' sign.

On the 13th the Foresters started packing up for a move to the Algiers area. The move began on the 15th and by the 19th the Battalion had arrived at Blida, near Algiers, where they went into camp in some olive groves. Here they were to remain until early August training and preparing for the next move, which everybody sensed would not be long delayed.

On the 9th August a move to Bizerta in three echelons—rail, road and sea—began, and was completed by the 13th. The whole of the 46th Division was concentrated in this area and the troops were very thick on the ground. This attracted the attention of enemy aircraft and in an air raid on the 17th the Foresters suffered four casualties—not from bombs, but from falling splinters from anti-aircraft shells.

On the 28th August the new Divisional Commander, Major-General J. L. I. Hawkesworth, visited the Battalion. Meanwhile Sicily had been invaded and conquered and it was apparent that plans for the invasion of the Italian mainland were progressing apace. Various types of landing craft, which were now associated with 'combined operations', began to collect at Bizerta and Naval officers and ratings—many of them Americans—were to be seen in increasing numbers.

General Clark's Fifth Army, which was to carry out the assault landing at Salerno, consisted of the VI American Corps and Lieut-General R. L. McCreery's X British Corps. (46th and 56th Divisions).

The general plan was for the VI American Corps to land on the right to the South of the Sele River with the X British Corps on its left between the Sele and the Picentino Rivers (see Sketch Map IX). The 46th Division was to be on the left of X Corps, with the task of capturing Salerno and advancing on Naples.

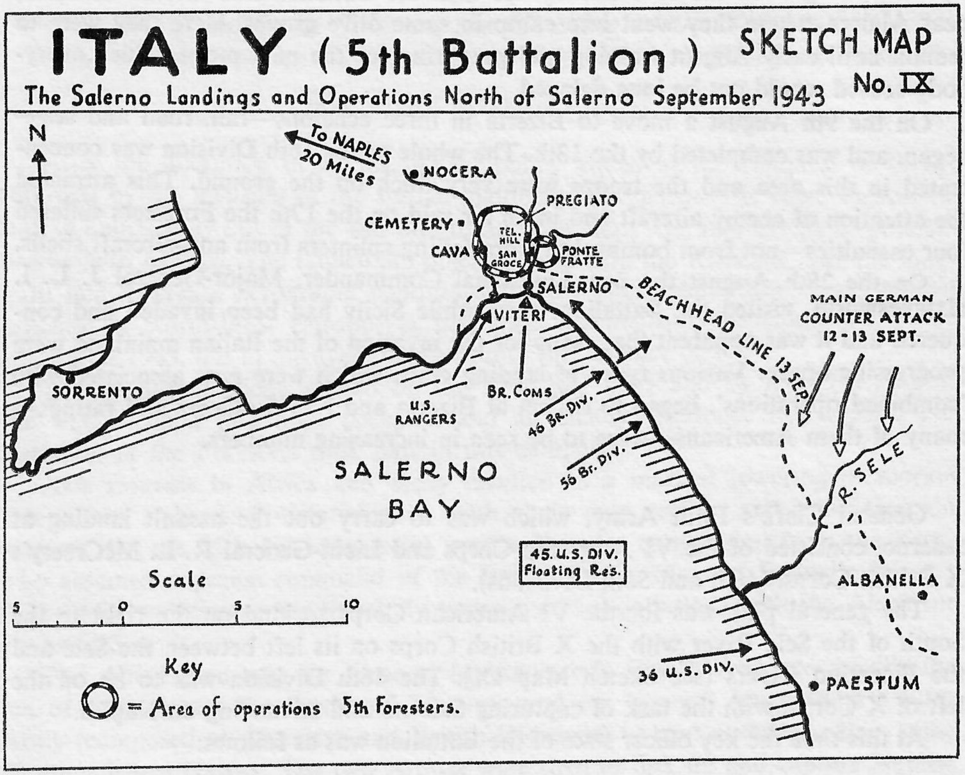
At this time the key officer state of the Battalion was as follows:

Commanding Officer	Lieut-Colonel E. A. Hefford
2nd-in-Command	Major G. P. Gofton-Salmond
Adjutant	Captain P. G. M. Litton
Quartermaster	Captain R. V. Hammond

Company Commanders:

A	Major D. K. Crews
B	Major R. Newton
C	Major G. A. K. Davenport
D	Captain J. W. Peacock
Support	Major C. A. W. Williamson
HQ	Major B. Keith-Lucas

The Battalion embarked on the 5th September on three L.S.I.s and two L.S.T.s,* manned by American Naval personnel. It will be as well here to give a brief explanation of the assault vessels used in combined operations in World War II. Early in 1942 it became apparent that before the war could be won, in either the West or East, many landings, some on a very big scale, would have to be undertaken on open beaches against stubborn resistance. Both America and Britain, therefore, designed and built special boats for this purpose which were now coming into service in considerable, although insufficient, numbers. Those for the first waves of assault troops were known as 'landing craft'—'Landing Craft Infantry' (L.C.I.), 'Landing Craft Tanks' (L.C.T.), etc. They were of small size and were designed to land the first parties of Infantry together with their supporting anti-tank guns, tanks, etc., and a few tactical vehicles. They were normally carried to within a few miles of the coast to be assaulted in a ship and then lowered into the sea, with their men and equipment, to complete the run ashore under their own power. Once a firm and fairly substantial beachhead had been secured reserve troops, heavy equipment, stores, etc., were taken ashore in 'landing ships'—'Landing Ships Infantry' (L.S.I.s), 'Landing Ships Tanks' (L.S.T.s), etc. Britain and America adopted the


ITALY (5th Battalion)
SKETCH MAP
No. IX
The Salerno Landings and Operations North of Salerno September 1943
N
To NAPLES 20 Miles
NOCERA
PREGIATO
CEMETERY
TEL. HILL
SAN CROCE
PONTE FRATTE
CAVA
SALERNO
VITERI
BEACHHEAD LINE 13 SEP.
MAIN GERMAN COUNTER ATTACK 12 - 13 SEPT.
SORRENTO
U.S. RANGERS
BR. COMS
46 Br. DIV.
56 Br. DIV.
SALERNO BAY
R. SELE
45. U.S. DIV. Floating Res.
ALBANELLA
Scale
5
0
5
10
36 U.S. DIV.
PAESTUM
Key
○ = Area of operations 5th Foresters.

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* L.S.I. = Landing Ship Infantry. L.S.T. = Landing Ship Tank.

same nomenclature for their landing craft which were of similar, but not always exactly the same, design. In the European theatre there was always a shortage of landing craft and this often influenced the scope and timing of operations. The shortage in Europe was due very largely to the insatiable requirements of the Americans for their Pacific War.

The convoy left Bizerta at about 12 noon on the 7th September and began arriving off Salerno Bay soon after midnight on the night of the 8/9th. The 128th Brigade landed at 3 a.m. on the 9th and was followed by the 138th Brigade, who pushed on to Salerno which was occupied on the following day. German guns, however, continued to dominate the port, and it was to be nearly a fortnight before it could be used by Allied shipping.

The landings of the 46th Division were opposed by the German 16th Panzer Division. They put up a typically tough resistance; but were very thin on the ground, and the two leading Brigades of the 46th Division made satisfactory progress.

It was to be nearly another twenty-four hours before units of the 139th Brigade began to disembark. This they did soon after midnight on the 9/10th September, and dawn found them in an assembly area about Corriali.

The hinterland behind Salerno and the coast to the South was difficult country to fight in. Only in the vicinity of the beaches was it flat. Behind rose steep hills, covered with stiff scrub. Except for a few main roads, and the railway, communications consisted of narrow winding hill paths.

The Foresters' first task was an attack by B and D Companies on the afternoon of the 10th in support of the 6th Bn. The York and Lancaster Regiment who were hard pressed in the area about 2 miles North-East of Salerno. This attack was successful in reaching the objective; but the enemy reacted swiftly and a strong counter-attack drove the two Companies back to their original positions. After dark that evening A and C Companies moved up the main road to Ponte Fratte, a village about 2 miles inland and near the scene of B and D Companies' attack. There they dug in and were heavily mortared and shelled the following morning.

The Battalion was now together holding a somewhat precarious and 'untidy' defensive area. At about 3 p.m. (11th), when Colonel Hefford was about to issue orders for a further attack on the B and D Company objective of the previous day, news came in that A Company had been heavily attacked and overrun. The Germans pushed on down the road for about half a mile before being stopped; but they were still within supporting distance of their mortars and artillery. Their next move was to subject C Company to an intense bombardment. This was followed by a strong attack and that Company was also overrun.

The position looked ugly and at dusk the Germans repeated their tactics against D Company, who by then had taken up a good position on the right of the road with B Company in support. This time the attack was held and the enemy suffered severely, but nevertheless the situation was still serious. Two Companies of the 2/5th Leicestershires were sent up to assist the Foresters, but they lost direction in the dark and spent the next three days battling against a German force which very nearly succeeded in surrounding them.

By the early morning of the 12th September the 5th Foresters had regrouped and were firmly established astride the road with a troop of Tanks in support. Soon after dawn a patrol led by Captain P. C. Palmer was sent out to try and locate the two missing Companies of the Leicestershires. They fell in with an enemy patrol —said to be dressed in British uniforms or in clothing which the Foresters' patrol mistook for British—and suffered heavy casualties. Only two men regained the Battalion lines. Later in the morning another attempt by the enemy to advance down the road was beaten off.

This was the enemy's last offensive effort on this part of the front, and for the next week the 5th Foresters remained in their positions, heavily mortared and sniped at almost continuously. The enemy attacks on the front of the 46th Division had been a purely local affair; but some miles to the right, near the junction of the British and American Corps, a heavy counter-offensive was launched on the 13th and 14th September by the 16th, 26th and 29th Panzer Grenadier Divisions. This attack reduced the depth of the beachhead by as much as 5 miles around Albanella before it was halted. A very important factor in deciding the Battle of Salerno was the part played by the Royal Air Force. On the 12th, 13th and 14th the entire tactical and strategic air forces in the Mediterranean theatre, which were within range, supported the Allied troops in the beachhead.

It had been intended that the 4th Hampshires should relieve the Foresters on the 19th September, but it happened that the time of relief coincided with a local enemy attack on the Hampshires. As a result the 5th Battalion was not relieved until later and then by a Battalion of the Grenadier Guards. By 5 a.m. on the 20th the Foresters had withdrawn to a rear area to rest and reorganize.

Having secured the beachhead the next task of the X British Corps, particularly the 46th Division on the left, was to clear the hilly country, extending for some 5 or 6 miles North of Salerno and Vietri, to permit the 7th Armoured Division, now landed and ready for action, to break out into the plain of Naples and capture the port.

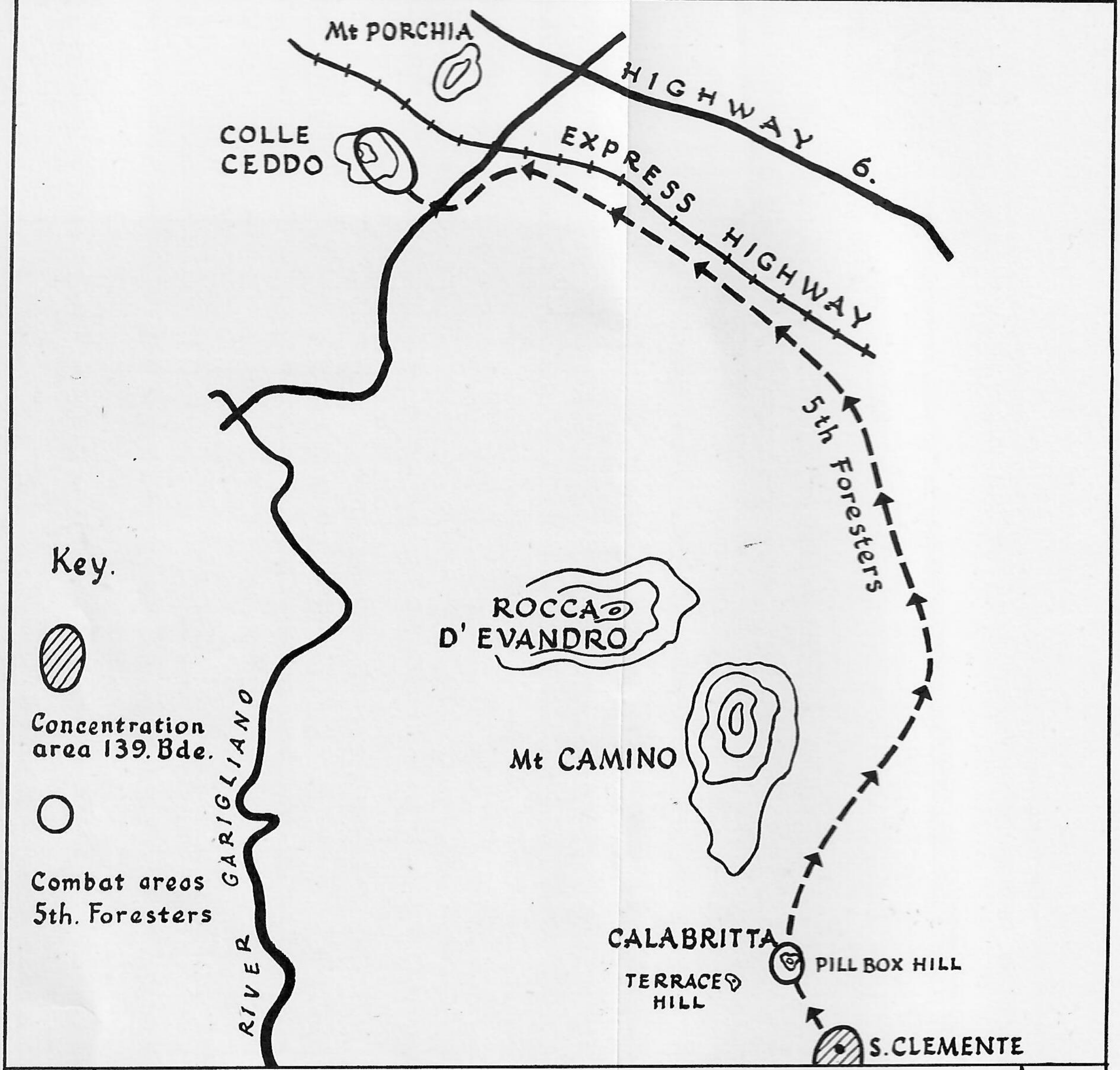
The 22nd September found the 138th and 139th Brigades probing forward on either side of the road leading North from Vietri through the Cava gap. Operations were very confused in the wooded hills in this area and the Battalions of the two Brigades became mixed and often trespassed into each other's territories. The 5th Foresters were on the right of the road, and during the night of the 22/23rd had great difficulty in finding their way, but by dark on the 23rd had occupied most of San Croce; but the main attack by the K.O.Y.L.I. some two miles to the North-West was held up by heavy mortar and shell fire. The following evening the Foresters attacked and captured Telegraph Hill. This greatly helped the K.O.Y.L.I., who managed to establish themselves in Pietro, and on Adiutore Hill, by the morning of the 25th September.

The Foresters then pushed on and by the evening C Company was established in the village of Pregiato. This movement outflanked the enemy's main position

ITALY (5th Battalion)

SKETCH MAP
No. X

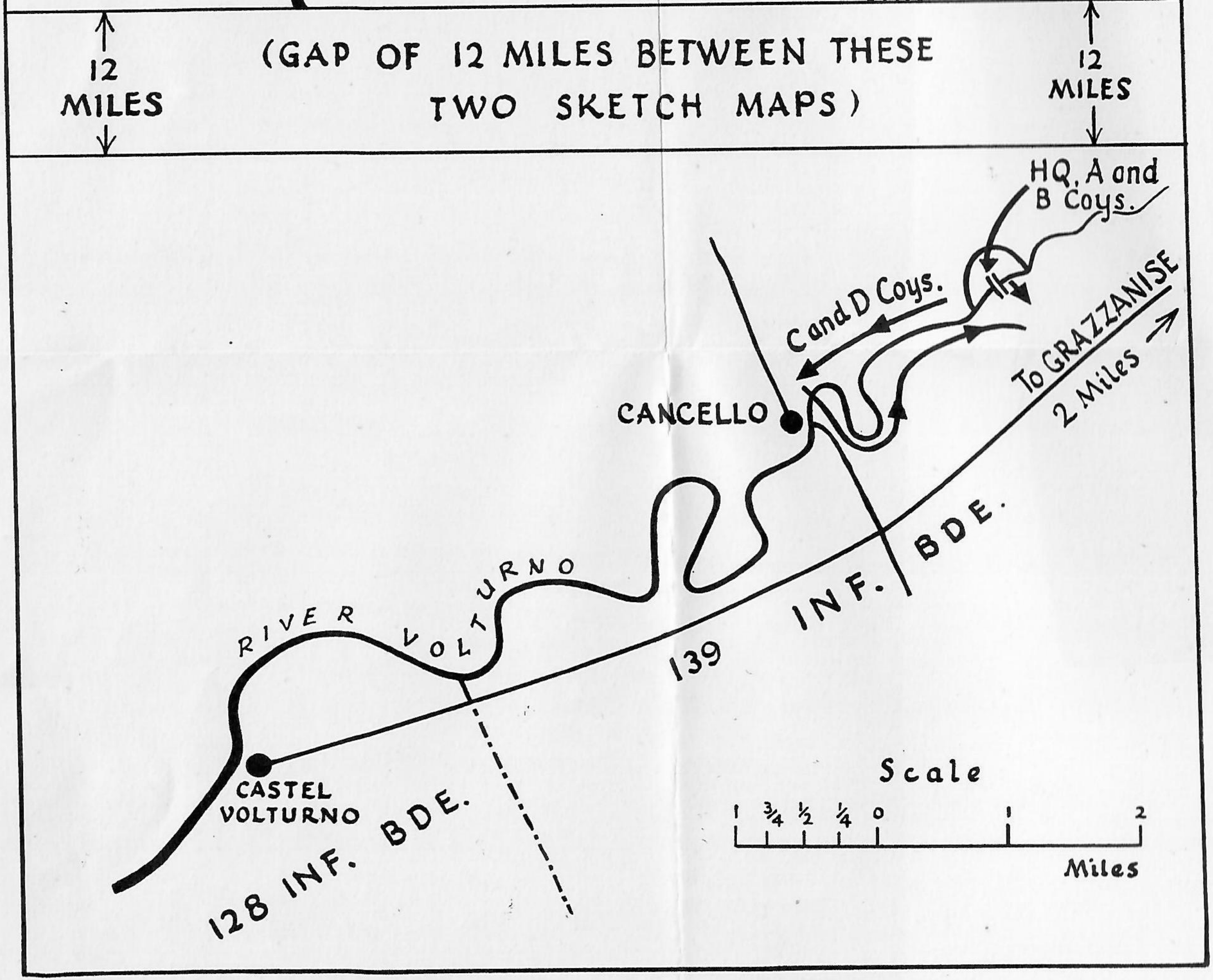
Crossing of the VOLTURNO (below) and the GARIGLIANO (above)


Mt PORCHIA
HIGHWAY 6.
COLLE CEDDO
EXPRESS HIGHWAY
5th Foresters
Key.
Concentration area 139. Bde.
Combat areas 5th. Foresters
ROCCA D'EVANDRO
Mt CAMINO
RIVER GARIGLIANO
CALABRITTA
PILL BOX HILL
TERRACE HILL
S. CLEMENTE

12 MILES

(GAP OF 12 MILES BETWEEN THESE TWO SKETCH MAPS)

12 MILES


12 MILES
(GAP OF 12 MILES BETWEEN THESE TWO SKETCH MAPS)
12 MILES
HQ, A and B Coys.
C and D Coys.
CANCELLO
To GRAZZANISE
2 Miles
RIVER VOLTURNO
139 INF. BDE.
CASTEL VOLTURNO
128 INF. BDE.
Scale
1 3/4 1/2 1/4 0 1 2
Miles

astride the Cava road. These were fine operations in which the 5th Foresters had played a leading part in a movement which was very shortly to clear the Cava road and allow the armour to pass through to Naples. The operations were of the most strenuous kind—up and down steep hills and always with the story, rarely correct, that the next ridge was the last one. All supplies, including water, had to be delivered by porters.

Good progress was also made astride the road and to the West—but not without hard fighting. By the 25th the 128th Brigade had begun to pass through Cava and that night the forward troops cleared the Cemetery. Enemy resistance was weakening and this phase of operations was nearing its end.

On the morning of the 28th the 7th Armoured Division (the famous 'Desert Rats') passed through, leaving the Infantry to clear the numerous pockets of resistance which still held out in the hills.

Three days later (1st October 1943) the 7th Armoured Division occupied Naples and on the same day the 78th Division captured Foggia airfield on the other side of Italy. This completed the first phase of the campaign.

Among the heavy casualties suffered by the 5th Foresters since the landing earlier in September were three officers killed, four wounded and three missing.

With the fall of Naples Field-Marshal Kesselring withdrew his forces to the River Volturno, some fifteen miles to the North of Naples, holding the line of the river from Capua to where it entered the sea on the West coast of Italy near Castel Volturno. This position was a strong one held by the 15th Panzer Grenadier and the Herman Goering Divisions, with sufficient tanks and infantry in reserve to enable the launching of powerful counter-attacks should the necessity arise.

The Foresters were given a few days' rest, to reorganize and absorb reinforcements, before the 139th Brigade moved forward to the Volturno on the 5th October. The Brigade front extended from the mouth of the river to a point on the river some eight miles from the sea and two miles West of Grazzanise.

The next task for the 46th Division was to cross the Volturno. This was to be done on a front of about six miles with the 139th Brigade on the right and the 128th on the left. Further North-West at Grazzanise the 7th Armoured Division was to establish a bridgehead to protect the 46th Division's right flank. Further to the right the 56th Division was to cross around Capua.

The rôle of the 5th Foresters was a very special one. They were to be on the right of the whole Division, with the task of crossing the river and seizing Cancello in order to protect the right flank of the 139th Brigade. They were to have the rather unusual experience of fighting almost in isolation in what was, nevertheless, a big battle involving several Divisions.

Lieut-Colonel Hefford's plan was to cross the river by night about two miles East of Cancello, establish a small bridgehead there and then swing left down the North bank of the river to capture the village. The details of this were as follows:

B Company to cross first to form the initial bridgehead.

D Company to follow, turn West and secure a nearby road junction.

A Company to come next, pass through B Company and clear the road ahead for a further $\frac{3}{4}$ mile or so.

By this time C Company would have crossed and C and D Companies were to join up, advance to the Eastern outskirts of Cancello and clear the town at dawn.

At this time the Company Commanders were the same as given earlier in the chapter—except B Company, now under Captain H. H. Pockson, and C now commanded by Lieutenant Geoffrey Morris.

The first part of the plan worked well. At 10.30 p.m. on the 12th October the assault boats containing B Company crossed successfully and the troops made an unopposed landing. The Company very quickly established a small bridgehead and the rest of the Battalion followed without any alarms or serious difficulties.

A Company was sent off to deal with some Germans in houses just to the North of B Company's position. The enemy opened fire, but the Foresters kept going and eventually cleared the houses, killing and capturing a number of Germans. It was disappointing at this stage to find that the artillery were unable to give effective support owing to the extreme darkness of the night, which made it difficult for the Forward Observing Officer to identify targets.

Meanwhile C and D Companies set off to clear Cancello.

At dawn A Company was attacked by three German tanks and some Infantry, and, after suffering severe casualties, was driven out of the position they had occupied the night before. A Company began this action with 70 men and ended it with 23. German casualties were also very heavy.

During the morning (13th) enemy Tanks and Infantry closed in on Battalion Headquarters and A and B Companies in the bridgehead. Communications with C and D Companies were now cut and a patrol of 10 men under Lieut. J. Wright was sent off to get in touch with them. By this time the Brigade Commander had become aware of the severity of the fighting on the Forester's front and had informed Lieut-Colonel Hefford that his primary task now was to hold on to the bridgehead. C and D Companies were to be pulled in from Cancello to help in this task; but unfortunately the Commanding Officer was unable to get in touch with them. Lieut. Wright's patrol ran into an enemy post and failed to get through, as did the reserve Platoon of B Company which made the attempt later and suffered heavily.

In the early afternoon a signaller who had been with C Company swam the river twice in order to deliver a message to Battalion Headquarters. The picture was a gloomy one. The two Company Commanders, Captain J. W. Peacock (C Company) and Lieut. G. R. Morris (D Company) had been wounded, and many others had become casualties. Heavy enemy opposition had prevented them entering Cancello, and they were pinned down by mortar and machine-gun fire.

As the afternoon wore on the plight of these two Companies, isolated from all other troops, became desperate, and Captain Peacock, who although wounded retained command, decided that the only alternative to annihilation was to cross the river and rejoin the rest of the Battalion via the South bank. The movement started soon after 3 p.m., covered by a party of two officers and six other ranks of D Company armed with six light automatics. The crossing was carried out under enemy fire, but with surprisingly few casualties. The covering party escaped without casualties and crossed at dusk.

In the bridgehead the situation was also serious. Captain H. H. Pockson, the Commander of B Company, had been killed and all the other Company Commanders were wounded. Towards the evening the enemy started attacking the right flank, and about the same time Lieut-Colonel Hefford and the 2nd-in-command, Major G. P. Gofton-Salmond, were wounded during some close-quarter fighting near Battalion Headquarters. The losses, particularly among officers, and the increasing strength of the enemy now reinforced by tanks, made it clear that the position could not be maintained. The worst of the wounded were ferried across in boats and the remaining survivors swam or waded.

When the whole Battalion assembled south of the river that evening it was found that, of approximately 450 all ranks who had gone into action the previous day, 14 Officers and 202 Other Ranks had become casualties. By holding on to the position for eighteeen hours the Battalion protected the right flank of the Division and assured the success of the main crossings further down stream. For this the 5th Foresters received the personal thanks of the Divisional and Brigade Commanders.

Soon after this Lieut-Colonel J. R. Welchman took over command, Lieut-Colonel Hefford having been evacuated to hospital as a result of his wounds.

After the battle for the Volturno crossings Field-Marshal Kesselring withdrew his forces in three stages—first to the line of the River Trigno, then to the Sangro and finally to the high ground covering the Garigliano, which was to be the Germans' winter line.

On the 15th November 1943 General Mark Clark decided to call a halt in order to regroup, reinforce and rest his Divisions. By this time it had been decided to transfer considerable forces from Italy to North-West Europe in anticipation of the cross-channel assault on occupied France which was to take place in the early summer of 1944. Among the Divisions to leave Italy was the 7th Armoured Division which had played the leading part in capturing Naples, and other exploiting moves, after the landings at Salerno.

The 5th Foresters took some little time to absorb reinforcements and reorganize after their severe hammering, and heavy casualties, on the Volturno. Although frequently on the move, and engaged in patrolling and other minor activities, it was not until the assault on Mt. Camino—the formidable *massif* covering, and situated about 3½ miles from, the Upper Garigliano—in early December that the Battalion was seriously engaged again.

Dusk on the 1st December found the 139th Brigade in the area of La Morata and S. Clemente in the foothills, and about three miles to the South of the summit of Mt. Camino. They were to attack that night, the Foresters on the right (directed on Calabritto and the woods to the North) and the Leicesters on the left (directed on Terrace Hill to the West of the village). For this operation the Battalion had attached to it some men of the 146th Pioneer Company to act as porters, and a troop of tanks of the 40th Royal Tank Regiment.

The battle opened at dusk when B Company moved forward and occupied Pill Box Hill unopposed (see Sketch Map X). This secured the start line for C and D Companies, who were to assault Calabritta. Unfortunately the going proved so bad that these two Companies arrived more than an hour late, and in consequence missed the benefit of the 218-gun barrage, which came down at 10 p.m. in accordance with the timed programme—and which it was found impossible to postpone owing to the failure of wireless communications in the hills.

Soon after the attack started it ran into wire and mines and came under heavy machine-gun fire, and the two Companies were forced back to the start line. At 6 a.m. the attack was renewed by B and C Companies who were supported by the attached troop of tanks—with a detachment of Sappers riding on them for the removal of mines. This attack progressed well until the leading troops reached the outskirts of Calabritta, when in the improving light they again came under devastating machine-gun fire, followed a little later by heavy mortar fire. It was clear that no progress could be made and that to remain where they were would be to invite heavy casualties. The two Companies were, therefore, ordered to withdraw. On the way back Lieut. K. W. R. Crane, who was commanding a Platoon of B Company, was severely wounded but continued to supervise the withdrawal of his Platoon although unable to move. Mainly owing to the efforts of Corporal Banton (of Crane's Platoon) and Private Dickenson (Crane's Batman), he was located and brought in by stretcher-bearers some thirty-six hours later.

Later in the day A Company relieved B Company on Pill Box Hill. A Company consisted mostly of men from the 8th Foresters and very few had seen active service. The Company, commanded by Captain Anthony Lord, now had a very responsible job, as on the retention of Pill Box Hill depended the deployment of the 56th Division, which was to make the final and main assault on Mt. Camino.

On this evening (2nd December) B Company of the 16th Durham Light Infantry, who had been attached to the 5th Foresters, advanced to the point reached by the morning attack and held on for most of the night, before eventually being compelled to withdraw. They suffered heavy losses, both the Company Commander and 2nd-in-Command being killed.

Meanwhile, in the early hours of the 3rd, three Battalions of the 56th Division passed just in rear of the position to assault Mt. Camino itself.

For three days the Foresters remained in the same position, where they received news of the slow, but steady, progress of the 56th Division against stubborn German resistance. On the 6th December the 16th Durhams and 2/5th Leicestershires attacked a spur to the West, and Terrace Hill, respectively. The Foresters organized an elaborate fire plan to support these two attacks, in which they fired very large quantities of mortar bombs and small arms ammunition.

By dawn on the 7th the 56th Division had completed the capture of Mt. Camino, and Rocca D'Evandro was entered on the 9th.

For the operations between the 1st and 6th December the 139th Brigade received special praise from the Corps Commander—the 5th Foresters in particular.

A pause was now necessary before any attempt to cross the formidable Garigliano—liable to flood in winter—could be made. The Foresters moved up into the line in mid-December; but were back in a rest area before Christmas, which was celebrated in the traditional manner.

About five miles to the North-West of Mt. Camino there are two hills called Mt. Porchia and Colle Cedro. The 'Express Highway' (railway) runs between them and 'Highway 6' immediately to the North. Mt. Porchia was in the American sector and Colle Cedro in the British, and it was considered necessary to capture both before the crossing of the Garigliano could be attempted.

Early on the 7th January 1944 the 5th Foresters were briefed for an attack on Colle Cedro. The attack was to begin at 5.15 p.m., without any preliminary bombardment, although artillery was available at 'call' if required. The approach to the hill was made in loose column of route—in the order A, D, C, B—down the railway line in the early stages and later along a road which enabled the Battalion to form up about a mile from the hill and facing approximately due West. On the right the Americans were assaulting Mt. Porchia; on the left the Foresters' flank was protected by a Company of the 16th Durhams.

A Company reached the first objective without difficulty. D Company, advancing towards the lower slopes in open formation, came under sudden and heavy mortar fire. The two leading platoons, under Lieutenants L. E. Dyke and G. A. W. Leslie-Carter, pressed on. Later they came under machine-gun fire, but the advance continued and D Company reached the summit. The Germans counter-attacked immediately but were beaten off. Unfortunately the top of the hill was rocky which made digging impossible. In face of heavy fire Captain B. Williamson, the Company Commander, ordered a short withdrawal to softer ground. That night the whole Battalion was established on the reverse (Eastern) slope of the hill.

Heavy shelling continued, but there was no further counter-attack. By the morning the enemy had withdrawn from Colle Cedro. The Americans had occupied Mt. Porchia, and then continued their advance towards Mt. Trocchia, the next hill about two miles to the North-West.

On the 17th January A Company occupied the village of Campo Fiore, near the junction of the rivers Garigliano and Rapido.

The next day the 5th and 56th Divisions made successful crossings of the Garigliano and on the night of the 19/20th the 128th Brigade (46th Division) made an attempt to cross, but gained only a limited success and had serious losses.

The Foresters were still in the Campo Fiore area and on the 20th B Company and the Battle Patrol* set off to capture Vandra, a village on the river a little more than a mile south of Campo Fiore. This place had already been attacked three times by other troops, but without success.

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* At this stage of the war all Infantry Battalions had a 'Battle Patrol'—in reality an extra Platoon in the Battalion directly under the Commanding Officer. It was composed of experienced, and lightly equipped, soldiers who were specially trained in patrolling, laying ambushes, etc.

The Battle Patrol, commanded by Lieut. W. S. Thompson, led the attack. It preceded the leading platoon of B Company by about 100 yards. As it approached the village from the left, it walked into a sharp burst of automatic fire and a hail of grenades. The leading section returned the greeting by hurling a number of phosphorous grenades into the enemy positions. A fresh burst of machine-gun fire came from a carefully concealed post only ten yards away. The Foresters at once turned all their weapons on to the German gun. It was quickly silenced.

Thompson next sent his reconnaissance group over to the left flank, ordering them to remain there until he called for them. As the group set off, fierce fire harassed the patrol from a house in the centre of the village. A section set off to attack this house from the flank, whilst the remainder of the patrol provided covering fire. With bren and tommy guns blazing, the assault party closed in on the house. The Germans inside were silenced within a very few moments. At this point Capt. C. A. Lord of B Company joined up with the patrol and reported that the front of the village was clear.

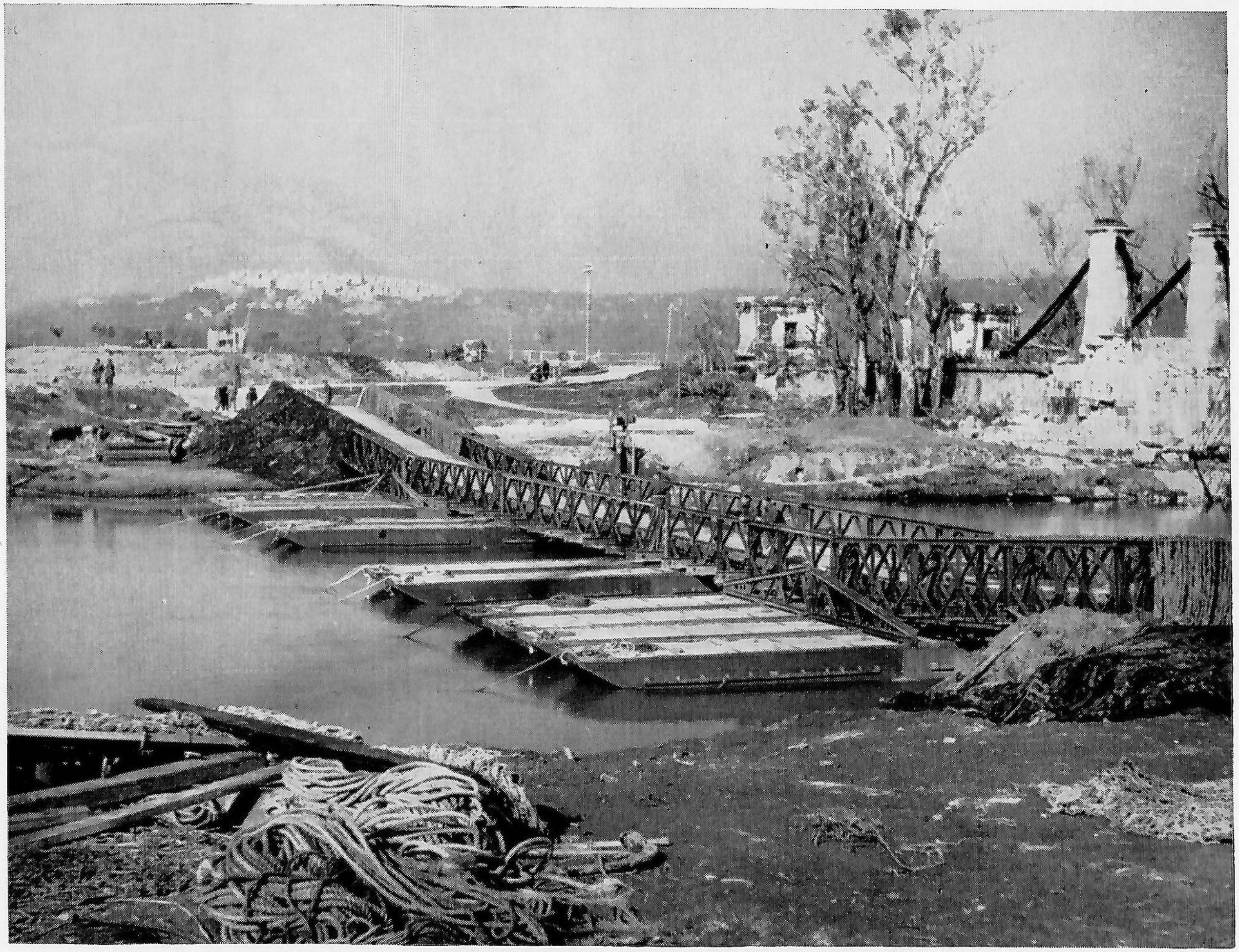
The fire support platoon, which had been ordered to cover the attack from a farm about 200 yards away, came in for trouble. On the way to the farm a mine went off. These mines were detonated by pull switches which were attached by lengths of wire to stakes driven into the ground. The explosion of the mine was the signal for machine-gun and rifle fire to break out from the farm house. Then the enemy brought his mortars into action. Other mines exploded, grenades lobbed to and fro, and several men were hit. Presently they were forced to withdraw through sheer lack of numbers. Casualties had been heavy and 2/Lieut. G. H. White, the platoon commander, organized his survivors into stretcher-bearers to evacuate the wounded.

The remainder of B Company, having heard the Battle Patrol's initial clash with the enemy on the left, came in from the right. One final push was necessary to secure the objective. Capt. Lord's Headquarters and a platoon commanded by Sergeant Price set off to the right. Immediately they were attacked by machine-gun fire from the rear of the village. The post was liquidated after three casualties and a swift rush across rubble-strewn streets. The Foresters then dug in at the far end of the village.

The next two days went by without any startling incidents. On the 22nd January there were rumours of a big Allied landing South of Rome: the Battle of the Anzio beachhead—in which two other Battalions of the Foresters played a worthy part—had begun.

The 5th Foresters spent the next three weeks in the line; but, apart from shell and mortar fire, and active patrolling by both sides, it was an uneventful period.

On the 31st January the Battle Patrol was attached to the 6th York and Lancaster Regiment with the task of creeping into the German lines and securing a prisoner—urgently required for identification purposes. The story is best told in the words of the report made at the time by Lieut. W. S. Thompson, the Patrol Commander.



Italy, 1944

The pontoon bridge over the River Garigliano in the 5th Battalion area

'We had covered a considerable amount of ground by now, and we began to wonder how much further it was before we could locate the Hun. As we carefully gained height up this immense feature, the tenseness grew. We at last reached the wall, which ran up the hill and which we clearly saw in our reconnaissance. Here we paused. Movement could be heard clearly from different places. Reports were coming to me from the rear of the patrol reporting movement and location of noises. There seemed nothing else for it but to go further up the mountain, when, as a last resort, I climbed several yards to my right to peep over a huge rock. To my great relief the "target for tonight" was only forty yards away. He was moving around quite freely and occasionally indulging in a warming exercise.

'The patrol was warned and set in position while the final approach was made by four of the reconnaissance group. As the Hun moved around, so we crept forward. The moon by this time was well hidden behind the mountains. Everything was deathly still as we edged our way on our stomachs nearer and nearer to the Boche. I reached a boulder which showed obvious signs of having been used as a part of a sanger—the ground sheet, etc., was visible. Where was the Boche? We hadn't heard him for some time now, but we felt sure he wasn't far away and that sooner or later he would move. I moved my position slightly and peeped over the boulder and facing me, about 1½ yards away, was a black object.

'Was this really the fellow we were after? As I stared at the object the one predominant thought in my mind was that, after all this effort and time taken, we must be absolutely certain of the whereabouts of the Boche before we made the plunge. In a moment or two, which seemed like an eternity, this object moved. He was rubbing his hands together for warmth. We rubbed ours together, too.

'We suddenly dashed out, grabbed the petrified prisoner by the neck and marched him away quickly. He was a very willing prisoner, and on more than one occasion he expressed his delight at his good fortune.'

The prisoner was identified as a member of the 276th Infantry Regiment.

By this time it had been decided to send the 46th Division to the Middle East for a time, to rest and refit. The 139th Brigade was the first to go and on the 14th February 1944 the 5th Foresters came out of the line. By easy stages the Battalion made its way to Naples and on the 21st it embarked on the troopship *Ascania* for Egypt. Soon they were to go to Palestine, before returning to Italy for another spell of fighting.

CHAPTER X

ITALY—II

The Anzio Beachhead December 1943 to May 1944

(See Sketch Maps XI, XII and XIII)

In the last chapter we saw how Allied troops, after their landing on the toe of Italy and at Salerno, had captured Naples and crossed the Volturno and Garigliano rivers. North of Naples, however, the going had been difficult. Each river obstacle was defended with typical German determination, and required the mounting of a carefully prepared assault before it could be crossed successfully—and then only at the price of heavy casualties. We have seen how the 5th Foresters played a fine part in these strenuous operations, until their departure for Egypt with the rest of the 46th Division in February 1944.

Meanwhile the 2nd Bn. The Sherwood Foresters had arrived in Italy from North Africa (December 1943), to be followed two months later by the 14th Battalion (February 1944). Both these Battalions were to participate in the battles of the Anzio Beachhead and the subsequent fighting. But before describing their activities at Anzio in detail we must look back to their movements since we left them, many months earlier, in North Africa and Egypt respectively (see Chapter 8), and also give a brief summary of the bigger picture in the Mediterranean Theatre.

The difficulties of pushing the Germans up the leg of Italy from river to river had impressed itself on the Allied high command, who hankered after some alternative to costly frontal attacks of this kind. Salerno had shown the way and the Prime Minister himself was pressing for another operation of that kind—what he called 'a "scoop" up the coast of Italy'. This was easy to suggest, but not so easy to carry out. It was hardly to be expected that the complete surprise attained at Salerno would be repeated. Moreover, the Germans had now reinforced Italy and were not likely to be caught again on the wrong foot, as they had been in September 1943. Some Allied troops had already left the theatre to join the Anglo-American forces which were assembling for the great assault on the Normandy coast, and others were due to follow shortly. Most important of all was the question of landing craft. As explained in the previous chapter no major opposed landing was practicable without large numbers of these special craft and, to use the jargon of those days, they were always 'in short supply'. The assault on North-West Europe was due to take place in May or June 1944, and it was essential that all landing craft which could be collected together should be in English waters, in a good state of repair, some weeks before then. This meant that any big combined operation in the Mediterranean must take place early in the year to allow the landing craft to be sent home in time for 'Operation Overlord.'* For these reasons any operations of this kind carried out in Italian waters would have to be conducted in the winter which would, and did in fact, greatly add to the risks and rigours of the undertaking.

2nd Battalion

After the bloodless victory at Pantellaria in June 1943 the 2nd Foresters returned to North Africa where they spent the next six months in training. During this period they were located at a number of places—Sfax (July 1943), Beni Khial (August 1943), then to Hammamet where they trained in mountain warfare during September and were inspected by General Eisenhower. The end of September found them at Cretteville, from where they returned to Hammamet on the 21st October, to move again to St. Germain on the 10th November. Finally at the end of November 1943 they received orders to go to Bizerta for embarkation overseas.

During the six months in North Africa there were two changes in command, Lieut-Colonel C. D. Armstrong (who assumed command on the 1st July 1943) being succeeded by Lieut-Colonel G. R. G. Bird on the 8th August 1943.

For the 2nd Foresters the early days of December 1943 really marked the beginning of the Anzio story. They embarked at Bizerta on the 4th December on H.M.T. *Letitia* and arrived at the South Italian port of Taranto on the 7th. Disembarkation was followed by a move North of Canosa, a small town south of Foggia. Here the 1st Division (Major-General W. C. R. Penney)—of which the Foresters still formed part—was in Eighth Army reserve. At the time the Eighth Army was fighting in, and around, Ortona and it was clear that the next major obstacle to be crossed would be the River Pescara. Consequently the Battalion devoted much of its time to practising river crossings under the guidance of the acting 2nd-in-Command, Major G. P. Gofton-Salmond, who had recently taken part in the crossing of the Volturno with the 5th Battalion. Meanwhile preparations for the celebration of Christmas in traditional style were not neglected.

Shortly before Christmas, however, the 3rd Brigade was warned that it would be the first in the Division to go into the line in relief of part of the 8th Indian Division, and that the move was likely to take place very soon after Christmas, even on Boxing Day. This did not prevent the enjoyment of one of the finest feasts any unit could have ever had—anywhere. Following their traditional duties at the men's midday meal the Officers foregathered at dinner that night. This was to be the last occasion on which many of the familiar faces would be seen at a communal table.

On the night of the 31st December the Battalion moved off, in what most thought was the direction of Pescara; but they were wrong: it was a 'cover plan', the real destination being Sarno, a small town some twenty miles South of Naples. The Battalion was billeted in the town in considerable comfort; but any doubt as to what was afoot was quickly dispelled when they were re-introduced to the now familiar L.C.I.s, L.C.T.s, L.C.A.s, and other landing craft and ships. For the next week or ten days Companies journeyed day-by-day to Castellemare to practise embarking, disembarking and loading.

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* 'Operation Overlord' was the code name for the Anglo-American assault on the Normandy coast, which actually started on the 6th June 1944.

On the 15th January 1944, in the former Royal Palace at Caserta (which had become Headquarters, Fifth Army), Brigadier J. G. James, the commander 3rd Infantry Brigade, briefed all his officers for the Anzio operation.

The troops involved all formed part of the United States VI Corps (Major-General Lucas) and consisted of the following troops:

3rd United States Infantry Division
504th United States Parachute Regiment
A Force of United States Rangers
1st British Infantry Division

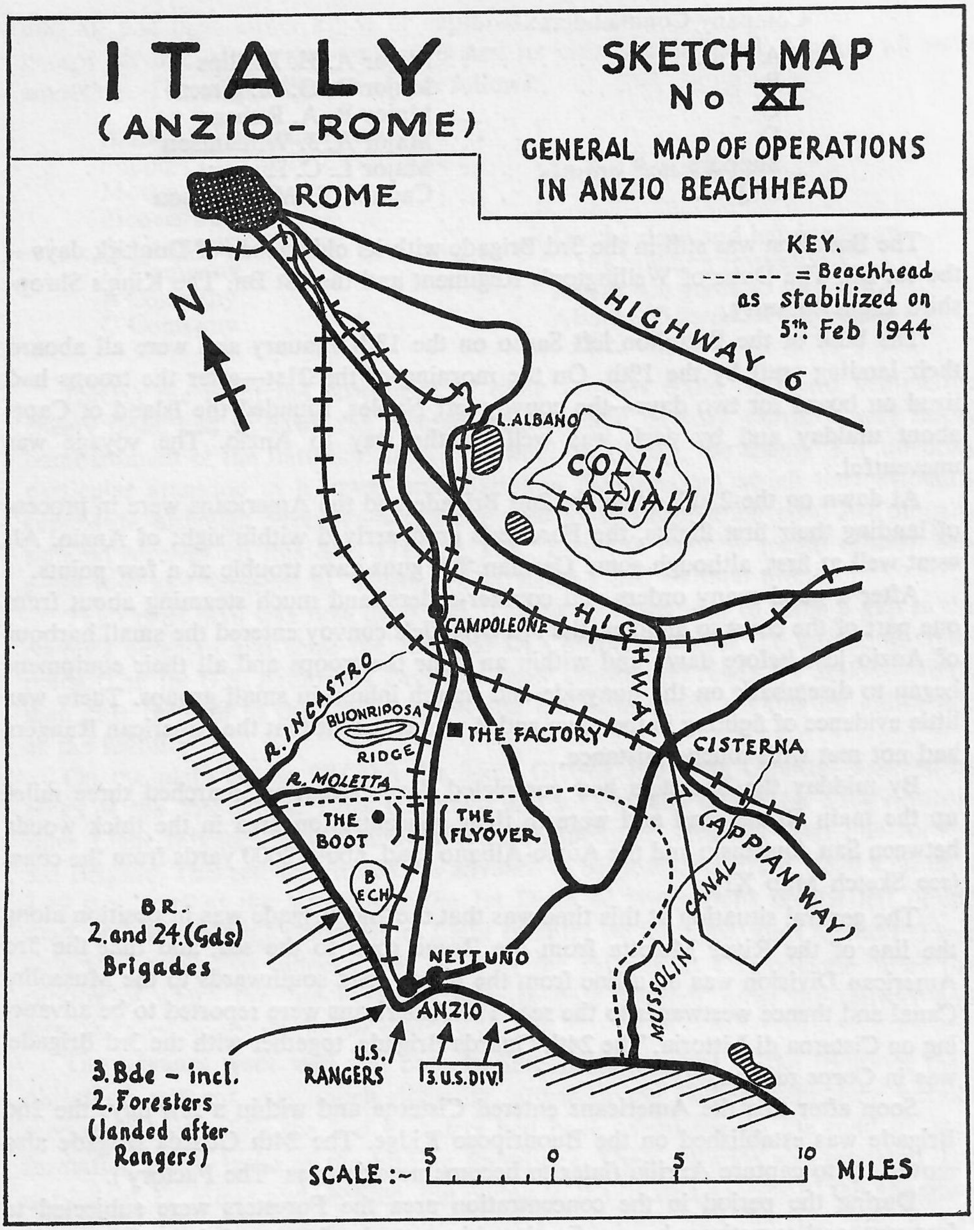
The plan was for the American parachutists to land about half an hour before dawn near an important cross-road* some eight miles North of Anzio. Just before dawn the following assault landings were to take place:

3rd U.S. Division . . .	South of Nettuno, adjoining Anzio
U.S. Rangers	To storm the port of Anzio
1st British Division:	
2nd Brigade	North of Anzio
24th Guards Brigade	Behind 2nd Brigade, in that order, and to form a Corps Reserve in an area north Anzio
3rd Brigade	

The immediate object was to obtain a substantial beachhead and then advance to a dominating feature called Colle Laziali, some 20 miles North of Anzio. If successful it was hoped that this would result in the liquidation of a major part of Kesselring's forces, which had by then been drawn South under the continuous pressure of the Allied Armies on the mainland. The Beachhead forces and those on the mainland would then link up and march rapidly on Rome. As will be seen it did not work out quite like that, and there were to be many desperate battles before Rome was occupied.

The enemy was thought to have the Hermann Goering Panzer Division near Velletri, a town on the seaward slopes of Colle Laziali, and at least part of the 3rd Panzer Grenadier Division just south of Rome.

* Subsequently this cross-road became known as 'The Flyover' (see Sketch Maps XI and XIII).


ITALY
(ANZIO-ROME)
SKETCH MAP
No XI
GENERAL MAP OF OPERATIONS IN ANZIO BEACHHEAD
ROME
KEY.
----- = Beachhead as stabilized on 5th Feb 1944
N
HIGHWAY 6
L. ALBANO
COLLI LAZIALI
CAMPOLEONE
HIGHWAY
R. INCASTRO
BUONRIPOSA RIDGE
THE FACTORY
CISTERNA
R. MOLETTA
THE BOOT
THE FLYOVER
(APPIAN WAY)
B ECH
MUSSOLINI CANAL
BR. 2. and 24. (Gds) Brigades
NETTUNO
ANZIO
U.S. RANGERS
3. U.S. DIV.
3. Bde - incl. 2. Foresters (landed after Rangers)
SCALE :- 5 0 5 10 MILES

At this time the Officer state of the 2nd Foresters was as follows:

Commanding Officer	Lieut-Colonel G. R. G. Bird
2nd-in-Command	Major J. H. M. Hackett
Adjutant	Captain W. L. Slingsby
Quartermaster	Lieut. A. Sargent

Company Commanders:

A	Major A. H. Phillips
B	Major R. G. M. Green
C	Major R. A. Rubens
D	Major A. J. Williamson
Support	Major L. C. Hunter
HQ	Captain T. W. Robinson

The Battalion was still in the 3rd Brigade with its old friends of Dunkirk days—the 1st Bn. The Duke of Wellington's Regiment and the 1st Bn. The King's Shropshire Light Infantry.

The bulk of the Battalion left Sarno on the 18th January and were all aboard their landing craft by the 19th. On the morning of the 21st—after the troops had lived on board for two days—the convoy left Naples, rounded the Island of Capri about midday and by dark was well on the way to Anzio. The voyage was uneventful.

At dawn on the 22nd, when the 2nd Brigade and the Americans were in process of landing their first flights, the Forester's craft arrived within sight of Anzio. All went well at first, although some German '88' guns gave trouble at a few points.

After a good many orders and counter-orders, and much steaming about from one part of the coast to another, the 3rd Brigade's convoy entered the small harbour of Anzio just before dawn and within an hour the troops and all their equipment began to disembark on the quayside and march inland in small groups. There was little evidence of fighting in the town and it was apparent that the American Rangers had not met with much resistance.

By midday the Foresters had completed disembarkation, marched three miles up the main Rome road and were in their concentration area in the thick woods between San Anastasio and the Anzio-Albano road, about 2000 yards from the coast (see Sketch Map XI).

The general situation at this time was that the 2nd Brigade was in position along the line of the River Moletta from the Rome road to the sea, and that the 3rd American Division was on a line from the Rome road southwards to the Mussolini Canal and thence westwards to the sea. The Americans were reported to be advancing on Cisterna di Littoria. The 24th Guards Brigade, together with the 3rd Brigade, was in Corps reserve.

Soon after this the Americans entered Cisterna and within a few days the 2nd Brigade was established on the Buonriposo Ridge. The 24th Guards Brigade also moved up to capture Aprilia (later to become notorious as 'The Factory').

During the period in the concentration area the Foresters were subjected to frequent, and sometimes heavy, dive-bombing attacks. In one of these the Battalion suffered its first casualty in the Beachhead, Lieut. H. E. Dent, an officer from South America, being wounded.

On the 28th January the 2nd Foresters were ordered to take over from the Grenadier Guards in 'The Factory'. This Battalion was very short of senior officers at the time, its O. Group having missed the way when making a reconnaissance and all had been either killed or captured. The relief took place after dark and, except for one of the anti-tank guns and its crew which struck a mine, all went smoothly. The dispositions were as follows:

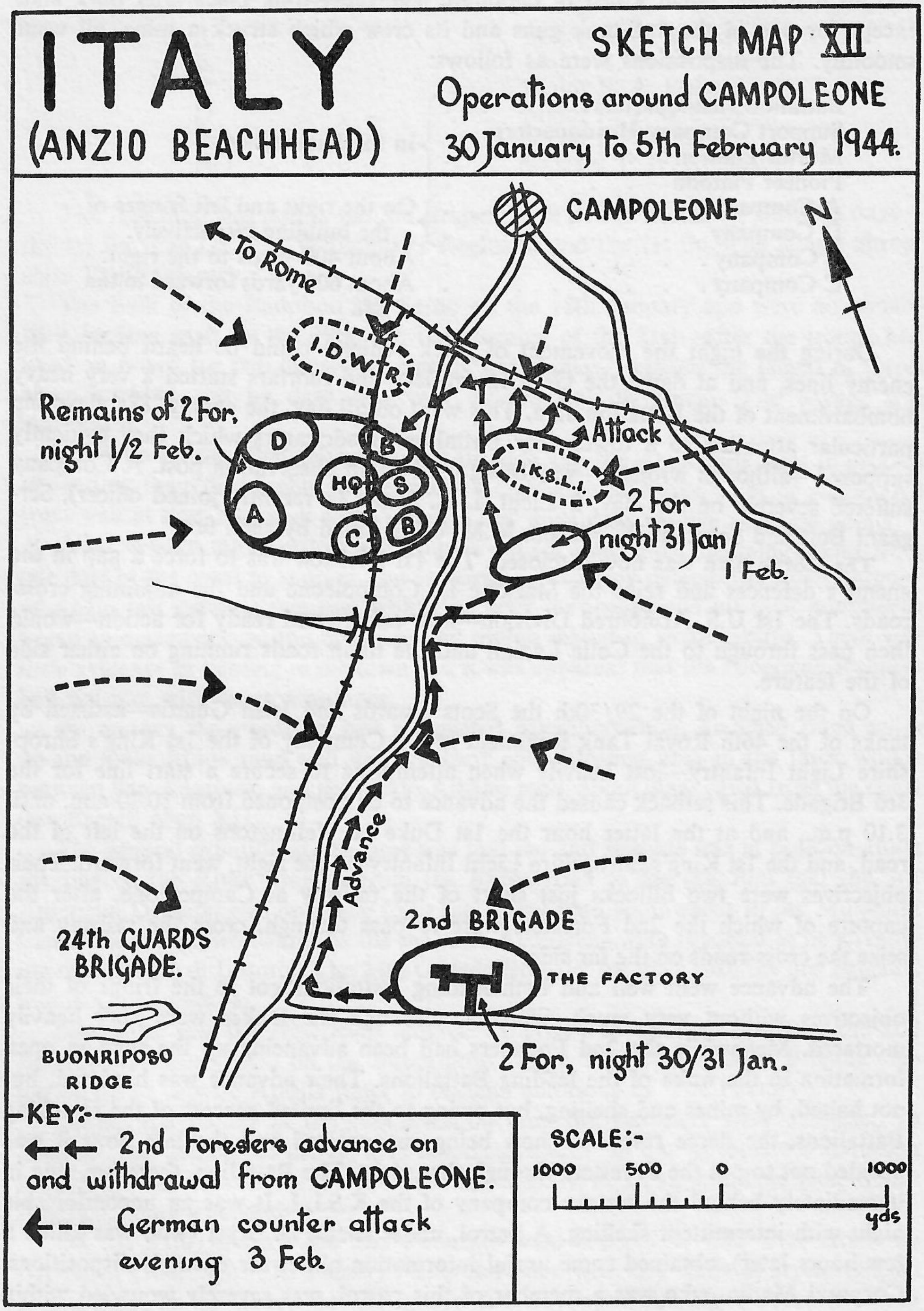
Battalion Headquarters	In the Factory.
Support Company Headquarters	
Mortar Platoon	
Pioneer Platoon	
A Company	On the right and left fringes of the building respectively.
D Company	
B Company	About 400 yards to the right.
C Company	About 600 yards forward to the left.

During the night the movement of track vehicles could be heard behind the enemy lines, and at dawn the German artillery and mortars started a very heavy bombardment of the Battalion area. This went on all day, the enemy '88s' devoting particular attention to a tower near Battalion Headquarers which they evidently supposed—although wrongly—was being used as an observation post. A Company suffered severely on this day, 2/Lieut. I. R. James (a recently joined officer), Sergeant Bott and Sergeant W. Wilson, M.M. being killed by shell fire.

The Corps plan was now disclosed. The 1st Division was to force a gap in the enemy's defences and seize the Stazione Di Compoleone and the adjoining cross-roads. The 1st U.S. Armoured Division—now ashore and ready for action—would then pass through to the Colle Laziali and the main roads running on either side of the feature.

On the night of the 29/30th the Scots Guards and Irish Guards—assisted by tanks of the 46th Royal Tank Regiment and a Company of the 1st King's Shropshire Light Infantry—lost heavily when attempting to secure a start line for the 3rd Brigade. This setback caused the advance to be postponed from 10.20 a.m. until 3.10 p.m., and at the latter hour the 1st Duke of Wellingtons on the left of the road, and the 1st King's Shropshire Light Infantry on the right, went forward. Their objectives were two hillocks just short of the railway at Campoleone, after the capture of which the 2nd Foresters were to pass through, cross the railway and seize the cross-roads on the far side.

The advance went well and both leading Battalions got to the fringe of their objectives without very much difficulty, although the Dukes were very heavily mortared. Meanwhile the 2nd Foresters had been advancing up the road in open formation in the wake of the leading Battalions. Their advance was hindered, but not halted, by mines and shelling, but owing to the limited success of the attacking Battalions, the fierce resistance now being encountered and the late hour it was decided not to put the Foresters through that night. The Battalion, therefore, dug in immediately behind the reserve company of the K.S.L.I. It was an uncomfortable night with intermittent shelling. A patrol, under Lieut. D. Bryer (who was killed a few hours later), obtained some useful information about the enemy's dispositions. Corporal Madin, who was a member of this patrol, was severely wounded within



ITALY
(ANZIO BEACHHEAD)

SKETCH MAP XII
Operations around CAMPOLEONE
30 January to 5th February 1944.

CAMPOLEONE
N
To Rome
I.D.W.R.
Remains of 2 For.
night 1/2 Feb.
D
B
HQ
S
A
C
B
Attack
I.K.S.L.I.
2 For
night 31 Jan/
1 Feb.
Advance
2nd BRIGADE
24th GUARDS
BRIGADE.
THE FACTORY
2 For, night 30/31 Jan.
BUONRIPOSO
RIDGE
KEY:-
2nd Foresters advance on
and withdrawal from CAMPOLEONE.
German counter attack
evening 3 Feb.
SCALE:-
1000
500
0
1000
yds

a few yards of an enemy position. Although he had several bullet wounds in the leg he managed to crawl back to the Battalion lines.

Early on the 31st January Lieut-Colonel Bird issued orders for the attack, which was to start at 10.30 a.m. Companies were disposed as follows:

	Left	*Right*
Forward	A	C
Rear	D	B

The intention was that the attack should advance up the Eastern side of the road and turn left after crossing the railway.

The Battalion came under heavy shell fire before it crossed the start line. As the advance continued, increasingly heavy fire came from the right, from some guns located by Lieut. Bryer's patrol the previous night. Many men fell, but the attack went on, although the ranks of the forward companies were greatly reduced by the time they reached the railway. On crossing the railway they were met by devastating fire from machine-guns and tanks concealed in houses. Casualties mounted, and seeing the impossibility of reaching the objective, the Commanding Officer, who was with the forward troops, ordered them back some 300 yards. The artillery then brought down very heavy concentrations on the located enemy positions. B and D Companies passed through A and C, but were met by the same ferocious fire as before. They were forced back to positions just South of the railway. The Battalion support weapons—mortars, medium machine-guns and anti-tank guns—which had advanced up the road some distance behind the Battalion, were now brought into action and did fine work for the rest of the day.

In the late afternoon the Brigade Commander ordered the Foresters into reserve behind the forward Battalions. As Companies trickled back they presented a very different picture to those which had advanced with such high hopes only a few hours before. The strongest Company had only 40 men left; the weakest 20. A Company had lost all its officers and was commanded by Sergeant Brown. All the Company Commanders were casualties—Major A. J. Williamson killed and Majors A. H. Phillips, R. G. M. Green and R. A. Rubens all seriously wounded. The Adjutant (Captain W. L. Slingsby) and the Mortar Officer (Captain R. Bennett) were both wounded. Many subalterns and senior N.C.O.s were casualties, among them C.S.M.s Rushin and Keleher and Sergeant Cooper killed and Lieuts. W. A. Davison, Pitt and Belton wounded. The Commanding Officer, Lieut-Colonel G. R. G. Bird, had been wounded in the leg and face.

The effective strength of the 2nd Bn. The Sherwood Foresters when it came into Brigade Reserve was 8 officers and 250 men. Among the Officer reinforcements who arrived that night were Major J. H. M. Hackett* to assume Command and Major S. L. A. Carter to become 2nd-in-Command. Captain H. E. Marking became Adjutant.

The general line of the beachhead perimeter was much the same as before, except for the salient which the 3rd Brigade had driven into the enemy defences

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* A few days later Major Hackett was promoted to the rank of Lieut-Colonel.

North of 'The Factory'. The whole Brigade was now crowded into the tip of this salient, with about 2½ miles of exposed flank on either side. The German is not the kind of warrior who neglects a chance of this sort and he did not do so on this occasion.

On the 1st February some more officer reinforcements arrived, and late that evening 4 Officers and 125 Other Ranks of the Black Watch joined the Battalion. The 2nd Foresters were now reorganized on a temporary basis and disposed as follows:

B and C Companies Group (Captain M. H. Fauvelle)	Astride the railway in all round defence, with a culvert as the centre of the position.
A Company (Captain B. H. Page)	Occupying a hillock about 300 yards south-west of the culvert, protecting the left and rear.
D Company (Captain P. A. Hewitt)	On another feature some 300 yards to the north-west of the culvert, protecting the left front.
Carrier Platoon (Lieut. J. W. A. Masters)	In very exposed positions protecting the right front.
Pioneer Platoon (Lieut. H. Schofield)	

Battalion Headquarters was about 100 yards in rear of the Carrier and Pioneer Platoons, in a small wadi.

Throughout the 2nd and 3rd February the noise of vehicles moving in rear, obvious registration by the artillery and other familiar signs, made it clear that an attack on the 3rd Brigade salient was imminent. It transpired that the Germans had concentrated very large forces in the area and on the evening of the 3rd February the blow fell.

At 8.30 p.m. a very heavy bombardment was opened on the 2nd and 3rd Brigade's position: it was particularly heavy on the 2nd Foresters' area. Diversionary attacks had been made against the 1st Duke of Wellingtons and 1st K.S.L.I. late in the afternoon and were repeated soon after midnight. Both attacks were beaten off.

The main attack was, however, delivered against both flanks of the salient (see Sketch Map XII) at 11.30 p.m. At first the attack was not actually on the Foresters' position, but on the base of the salient where the 2nd and 24th Guards Brigades were located. Confused fighting went on in rear of the Battalion all night. Communications were almost entirely cut and the Foresters could only judge the tide of battle from the Very lights, machine-gun fire and shelling which continued till dawn. Captain P. S. H. Osborne, a recently joined officer, was killed leading a patrol sent out to help clear up the situation.

When dawn came, and visibility began to improve, it became clear that the Battalion—and indeed the whole 3rd Brigade except its Headquarters—was cut off and in a very precarious position. The Irish Guards had been unable to hold their positions on the road to the rear, which was now controlled by the Germans. It was learned that Brigade Headquarters had been driven back by small-arms fire during the previous evening and was now cut off from its units. At 6.45 a.m. enemy 'Tiger' tanks were seen in the K.S.L.I. area—one being knocked out by a 17-pr. gun of the 81st Anti-tank Regiment located in the Foresters' area.

At 10.30 a.m. a very curious incident occurred. The Foresters saw about 100 men advancing towards them up the road from the South. At first they were mistaken for Germans coming in to surrender, but it soon became evident that it was a party of British prisoners being escorted up the road by about 40 Germans. It was impossible to open fire on the escort without doing even more harm to the prisoners. This encouraged the Germans to attempt to add some of the Foresters to the 'bag'; but as soon as the true situation was realized the Battalion reacted very quickly. Most of the German escort were killed or captured and some of the British prisoners who were able to re-arm themselves joined the Foresters. In this incident Corporals Jones and Austin, of the Anti-tank Platoon, behaved with conspicuous initiative and bravery; but unfortunately both were killed in another action which followed shortly afterwards.

Signs were not lacking that the enemy was closing in from East, South and West. The previous evening Lieut-Colonel Bird had moved Battalion Headquarters into the railway culvert and preparations were now made for the Foresters to make a 'Custer's Last Stand' round the culvert, if necessary.

Soon after the prisoner episode Major L. C. Hunter, the Support Company Commander, was despatched to A Company to assist the Company Commander. He was never seen again.* About the same time Lieut. H. R. Slade—who had a long and distinguished career in the Regiment, in the ranks and as an Officer—was killed.

Meanwhile the casualties were piling up and the possible fate of the wounded caused grave anxiety. The route to the Regimental Aid Post down the main road was under heavy fire and the R.A.P. itself was cut off from the Advanced Dressing Station. The wounded were, therefore, placed in the shadow of the railway embankment, among them being a number of Germans. By midday, however, motor ambulances were operating on the road, the enemy giving them free passage. It is pleasant to be able to record this act of humanity in the middle of a fierce battle in a total war. By this means, and also in carriers, most of the wounded were safely evacuated. Sergeant Sowter, the Medical Section Sergeant, was awarded the Military Medal for his devoted work on this day.

During the afternoon enemy tanks were seen on both flanks, but they kept their distance from the Battalion area.

Since midday the Brigade Commander had been trying to get a message through to the Foresters ordering them to withdraw at 5.30 p.m.; but wireless reception was so poor that it was not received until 5 p.m. As a result the Battalion arranged to begin withdrawing straight down the main road at 6.30 p.m. As this order came through the inspiring sight of a counter-attack was seen some two miles to the Battalion's right rear. This gallant action was fought by the 1st Bn. The London

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* Four months later his grave was found near the railway line, where he had been buried by the Germans.

Scottish (168th Brigade of the 56th Division) who, supported by tanks, were attempting to clear the right flank of the 3rd Brigade to help its withdrawal, and to a very large extent it succeeded.

At 6.30 p.m. the 2nd Foresters, following in the wake of the 1st K.S.L.I., moved South down the main road. All light equipment was brought away; heavy equipment, such as vehicles and anti-tank guns, being rendered unserviceable. The enemy apparently failed to realize what was happening and, although very close to the road during the early stages, did not seriously interfere with the withdrawal. By 3 a.m. on the 5th February the survivors of all Companies had assembled in the F Echelon area, in the woods some three miles behind the 'Flyover'. It is worthy of note that the Battalion Medium Machine Gunners carried all their guns and other equipment to safety—a most strenuous piece of man-handling over a distance of 10 miles.

The next two days were spent in rest and reorganization. During this period Captain J. V. T. Gostling, R.A.M.C., joined the Battalion in place of the previous Medical Officer, Captain L. J. H. Burton, R.A.M.C., who had been captured by the enemy earlier in the battle when attending wounded in a forward position. Captain Gostling remained with the Battalion for the rest of the war.

This was the Foresters most severe battle in Italy. It was now a mere skeleton of the fine unit which had landed at Anzio, only a fortnight before; but, such was its recuperative capacity, that in a very short time after receiving reinforcements it was a battleworthy Battalion again.

It was now evident that the Germans had got over their initial surprise, and that there was to be no easy victory, or rapid advance from the Anzio beachhead. It was to be three-and-a-half months before the troops in the beachhead and the main army joined up, and four months before the fall of Rome. In the intervening period there was to be much stubborn fighting, and many bloody battles, in the beachhead.

After their withdrawal the 3rd Brigade went into Divisional reserve. The Divisional line was now much the same as it had been before the attack. The 168th Brigade was now under the 1st Division and it and the 2nd and 24th Guards Brigades held the front.

Intelligence reports indicated that the enemy was likely to renew his attack at 4 a.m. on the 7th and on the afternoon of the 6th the 2nd Foresters were ordered forward to dig defensive positions to the East of the 'Flyover'. Just before midnight, when Companies were preparing to return to the F Echelon lines, they were ordered to occupy the positions. As the expected attack did not materialize the Battalion moved back to F. Echelon during the morning. That night (7th February) just after 9 p.m. the enemy renewed the attack with the greatest fury and the Foresters were ordered to 'stand-to' and be prepared to counter-attack.

The main attack came on the Buonripose Ridge held by the North Staffordshire Regiment on the Left. In spite of the valiant defence of this regiment the enemy captured the ridge and spent the rest of the night consolidating it. At 7 a.m. (8th February) the Foresters moved to an assembly area North-West of the 'Flyover'.

They were to be the left battalion in a counter-attack in conjunction with the K.S.L.I. As a preliminary move two sections of the Carrier Platoon occupied, without opposition, a small hill about one mile from Buonripose. The attack was planned to start at 11.30 a.m., but was postponed first until 12.30 p.m. and again until 1.30 p.m. This was most unfortunate as it resulted in the Battalion spending more than two hours in a very exposed position. It also gave warning to the enemy, as the artillery programme started at the original time.

At 1.30 the Battalion moved off, with A, B and C Companies forward from right to left and D in reserve, with the Ridge as their objective. It came under heavy shell fire before reaching the start line and this took a heavy toll, not only of the Battalion, but of the Brigade Staff and personnel of the 46th Royal Tank Regiment who were in support. At 3.30 p.m. A Company reported 'Objective captured', but there was no news of B and C. A little later Captains B. H. Page and M. H. Fauvelle (Commanding B and C Companies respectively) arrived back wounded. By 4 p.m. it was confirmed that A were on their objective, but no more than 35 strong, and that B Company were on a small hillock to the right rear of A. C Company had advanced to its objective, but had been met with devastating fire. The whole Company became casualties—killed, wounded or missing. Lieut. E. Woodlands, the Company Commander, recently commissioned from the Guards Brigade, was missing. He was an officer of exceptional courage and initiative.

Major S. L. A. Carter—who had taken over command that morning when Lieut-Colonel J. H. M. Hackett was slightly wounded on reconnaissance—ordered A Company to withdraw to stiffen up B Company on their hillock. D Company moved up to some farm buildings about 700 yards behind A and B.

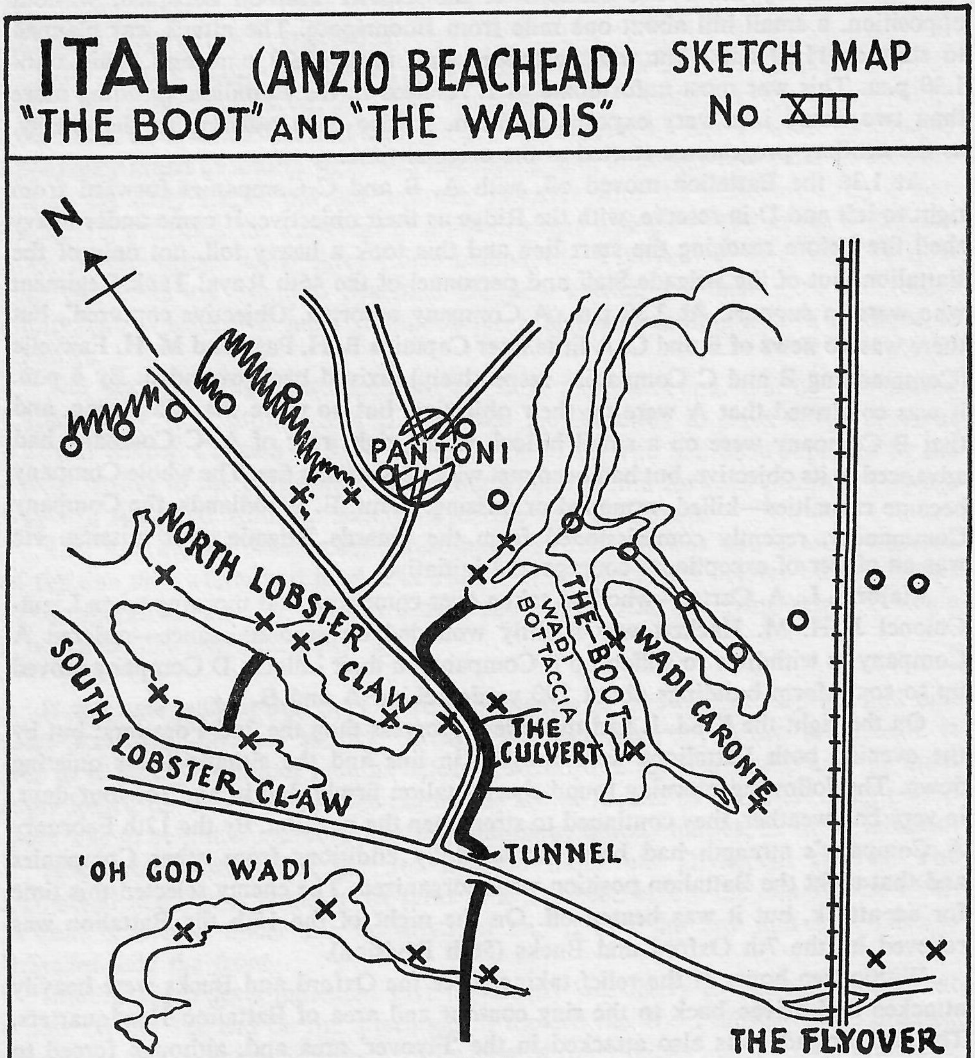
On the right the K.S.L.I. had made less progress than the 2nd Foresters; but by the evening both Battalions were roughly in line and the situation was quieting down. The following morning found the Battalion firmly dug in and for four days, in very bad weather, they continued to strengthen the position. By the 12th February A Company's strength had been increased by additions from other Companies and that night the Battalion position was reorganized. The enemy selected this time for an attack, but it was beaten off. On the night of the 15th the Battalion was relieved by the 7th Oxford and Bucks (56th Division).

Within two hours of the relief taking place the Oxford and Bucks were heavily attacked and driven back to the ring contour and area of Battalion Headquarters. The 2nd Brigade was also attacked in the 'Flyover' area and, although forced to give ground, this line remained unbroken and many prisoners were taken.

The week's rest which followed was spent in reorganizing and in getting to know the many new faces which had arrived to replace the recent heavy casualties. On the 22nd February the 2nd Foresters relieved the 1st K.S.L.I. in a reserve position to the right rear of the 'Flyover'.

(It was two days later, on the 24th February, that the 14th Foresters arrived in the beachhead. Their story in Italy begins in the latter part of this chapter.)

On the evening of the 28th February the Battalion relieved the 2/6th Queens in the area of Pantoni and 'The Boot'. The relief was completed by about 5 p.m. and


ITALY (ANZIO BEACHEAD) SKETCH MAP
"THE BOOT" AND "THE WADIS" No XIII
N
PANTONI
NORTH LOBSTER CLAW
SOUTH LOBSTER CLAW
WADI BOTTACCIA
THE BOOT
WADI CARONTE
THE CULVERT
TUNNEL
'OH GOD' WADI
THE FLYOVER
KEY
X British posts
O German posts
Communication Trenches dug by 2.Foresters

immediately the enemy put in a strong attack. This fell almost entirely on C Company around Pantoni, who suffered heavy casualties. The Company Commander, Captain C. Kilby, was last seen firing a Tommy-gun and rallying his men. Later his body was found, with seven of his men lying beside him.

Reports which came in soon after 9 a.m. indicated that the other Companies were established successfully (see Sketch Map XIII)—B Company in 'The Boot', D Company some hundreds of yards further forward and A Company near Battalion Headquarters with orders to move into B Company's area at dusk with a view to attacking and recapturing Pantoni at 10 p.m. The start time was eventually postponed until 2 a.m. on the 29th February, but on the way to the start line the Company came under very heavy shell and mortar fire. The Company Commander (Captain T. W. Robinson) was wounded and the Company scattered. It should be mentioned that weather conditions were very bad. The ground was waterlogged and movement, even at a slow pace, extremely difficult. Lieut. B. W. Aldis a newly joined officer, was now in command and he did his best to regroup the Company and get the attack going; but, in face of the severe fire and heavy going, he was unable to do so and the Company withdrew to a position just forward of B Company. Wireless communication had failed and this led Brigade Headquarters to assume that the attack had gone forward and been successful. In consequence they ordered Captain T. G. Gould, and three guns of the Foresters' Anti-tank Platoon, forward into Pantoni. Fortunately the guns were held up by a large shell crater some 200 yards from Pantoni and, on going forward to investigate, Captain Gould found the village still in enemy hands. After capturing a German sniper, found lying in a ditch beside the road, he withdrew to Battalion Headquarters with his prisoner.

The Battalion, already very weak when it moved up into the line, had suffered many casualties during the night. When dawn broke the strength of the four Rifle Companies together was no more than one hundred. The next day (1st March) Captain P. A. Hewitt was ordered to organize A, B, C and D Companies into a single Company. The only officers available to assist him were Captain F. J. Blakeley and Lieut. A. Rankin. Captain Hewitt and his men immediately set about the task of improving the defences of 'The Boot'.

The bad weather continued for the next few days. Great difficulties were experienced in supplying the forward troops. The men were becoming very exhausted and on the 4th March the Commanding Officer arranged for a party from the Support Company under Captains J. M. K. Nevitt and T. G. Gould, to go forward that night to relieve the more exhausted men and reinforce some of the posts. In the period 1st to 6th March the 2nd Foresters held the 'Boot' position in conditions of trench warfare which were among the most exacting experienced during the whole war.

On the night of the 6/7th March the Battalion was relieved by the 40th Royal Marine Commando. The relief was completed by midnight and this gallant band of Foresters were then conveyed in lorries to the B Echelon area for nine days' rest and to refit.

During this period the Battalion was reorganized into three Rifle Companies—

B (Captain F. J. Blakeley), C (Captain J. M. K. Nevitt) and D (Captain P. A. Hewitt). This was a critical time in the beachhead and the Foresters were given the task of organizing the B Echelon area into a defensive locality. They also formed part of VI Corps reserve with the rôle of counter-attack in any part of the beachhead.

During the first half of March a change in the composition of the 1st Division took place. The 24th Guards Brigade was withdrawn and its place in the Division taken by the 18th Infantry Brigade, consisting of the 14th Foresters, the 1st Buffs and the 1st Yorkshire Dragoons. This Brigade took over the sector to the immediate left of the 'Flyover'. Amercian troops were on the right.

On the 16th March the 2nd Foresters took over a sector of the defences from the 2nd Bn., 6th Armoured Infantry Regiment, United States Army. This part of the line was a very much quieter one than that on the other side of the 'Flyover'. Observation was at least as good as the enemy's and the approaches to the forward posts were mostly under cover.

Up to this time the Battalion had seen very little of American troops; but this period marked the beginning of a closer association in which many friendships were made with American combat units.

The last days of March 1944 began a period of several weeks trench warfare. For the 1st Division this entailed a series of complicated reliefs centring round a number of wadi and gully positions known by such names at 'Baccaccia', 'Boot', 'Starfish', 'Culvert', 'North and South', 'Lobster Claws', 'Caronte', 'Oh God Wadi' and others (see Sketch Map XIII).

It will not be necessary to recount the day-to-day life of the Battalion during this phase of operations. The story will be confined to a few incidents of special interest. By early April reinforcements in Officers and Other Ranks had been received; many new faces were to be seen, including a number who had been wounded in earlier engagements and returning sick.

On the night of the 5/6th April, when the Foresters were in the 'Culvert' area, B Company beat off an attack by some thirty Germans who suffered at least 25 per cent casualties. Three days later, on the evening of the 8th, B Company again repulsed a small attack in the same area, capturing four prisoners.

The night of the 1/12th April saw the relief of the Battalion by the Buffs. They went back to the B Echleon area for four days.

Meanwhile big events were taking place on the main Italian battlefront which, by the last week in May, were to result in a link up with the beachhead troops and be followed in early June by the capture of Rome.

The 2nd Foresters last action in the beachhead took place on the night of the 22nd/23rd May when a platoon of C Company—known as the Welsh Platoon—under Lieut. J. W. Charlton,* attacked from 'The Boot' a feature called 'Green

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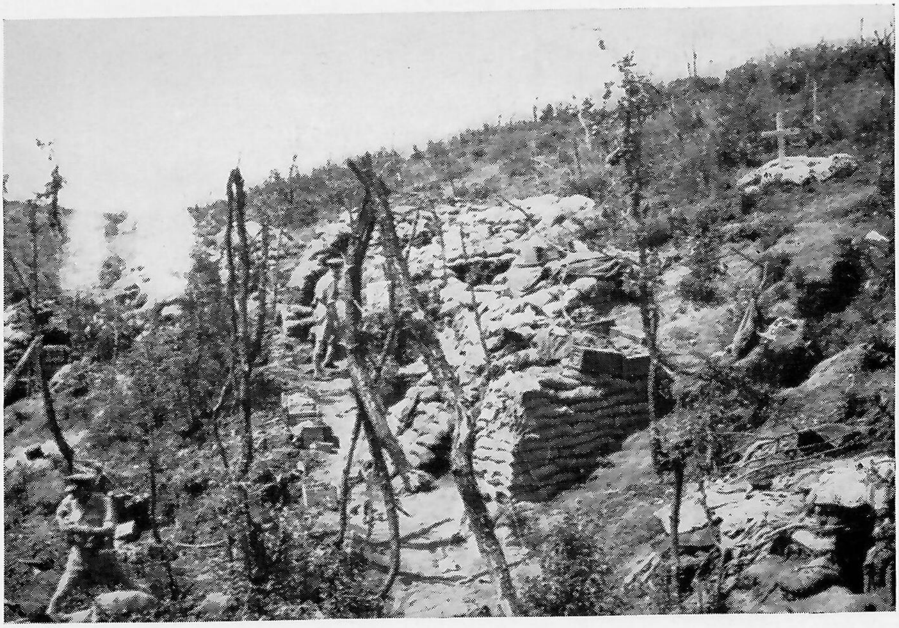
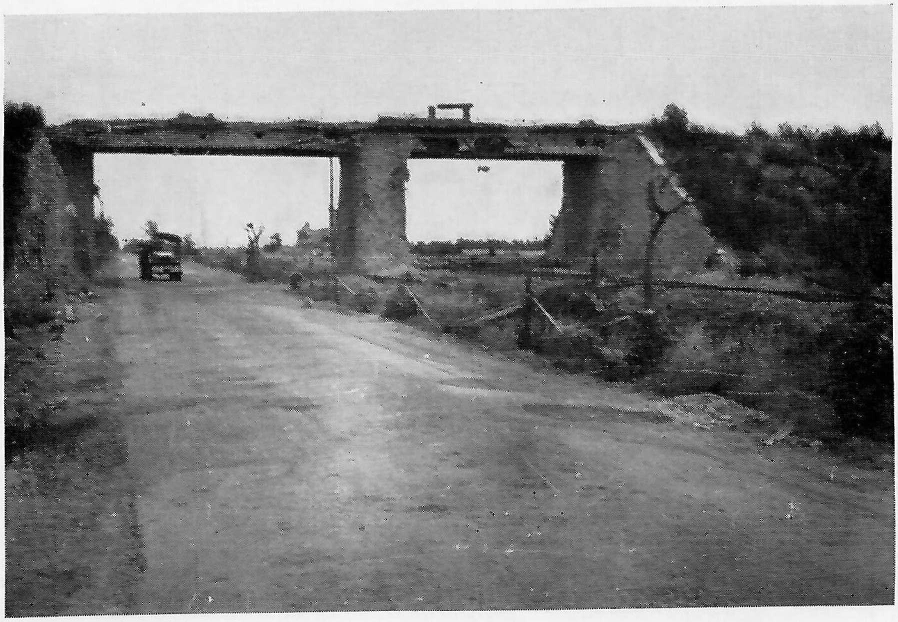
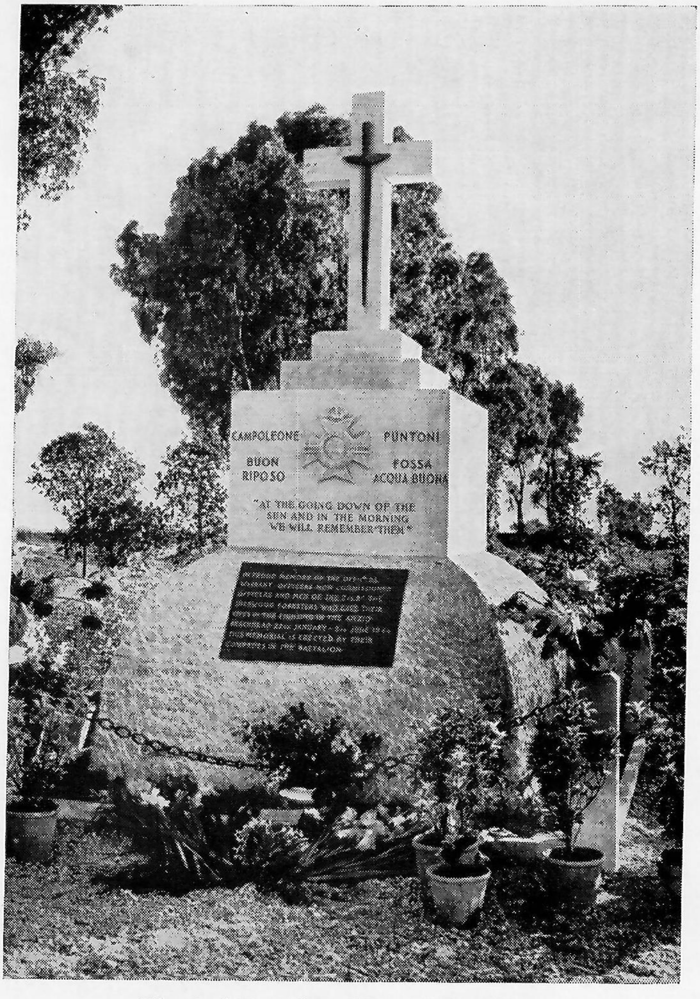
* Lieut. Charlton was a South African Officer seconded, with five others, to the 2nd Foresters from the Union of South Africa Army. He lost an arm as a result of his wounds in this action.



Anzio, 1944
The 14th Battalion's dugouts in a wadi



Anzio, 1944
The famous 'Flyover' bridge


CAMPOLEONE
PUNTONI
BUON RIPOSO
FOSSA ACQUA BUONA
"AT THE GOING DOWN OF THE SUN AND IN THE MORNING WE WILL REMEMBER THEM"

The 2nd Battalion Memorial at Anzio

Bush Hill'. This attack, carried out in conjunction with two Companies of the 1st Duke of Wellington's Regiment, was a diversion for a very much bigger attack by American troops on the right. It proved to be a tough proposition. Lieut. Charlton was badly wounded almost at once. But Sergeant Preddy and the gallant Welshmen pushed on and captured the objective. Under orders they withdrew just before dawn, having lost four men killed and thirteen wounded. On the following day Major S. L. A. Carter, the Battalion 2nd-in-Command, was wounded and had to be evacuated from the beachhead.

During the period of operations in the Anzio Beachhead the 2nd Foresters suffered higher casualties than any other British unit. These amounted approximately to 64 Officers killed or wounded and 888 Other Ranks killed or wounded—representing about 200 per cent of the Officer strength and 100 per cent of the Battalion as a whole.*

14th Battalion

We must now leave the 2nd Battalion to follow the fortunes of the 14th Foresters.

After its part in the Battle of El Alamein the 14th Battalion did not participate again in active operations for fifteen months. During that period they were far from idle, indeed they travelled far and wide over vast areas of Africa and Asia, visiting practically all the countries of the Middle East.

On the 1st January 1943 Lieut-Colonel C. B. Fairbanks took over command, and on the same day the Battalion left Egypt for Iraq. Travelling by the desert route along the oil pipe-line, it arrived at Baghdad on the 9th, moving some 22 miles to Latifya the following day, where it became part of 'Paiforce'.†

There they remained until the 8th May when they moved to Innsariya (near Beirut). This was followed by a series of moves in quick succession—Aleppo (early June), Slennfe and Damascus (July) and Amiriya on the 1st August. On that day Lieut-Colonel M. Redmayne assumed command. Three weeks later they were on the move again, to Villejaques and then in early September to Hammam Lif in Tunisia.

On the 11th October the 14th Foresters arrived at Algiers and this brought to an end a 'tour' of North Africa and the Middle East which must have been unprecedented before World War II, even by the most ardent traveller.

On the 1st February orders came to prepare for a sea voyage and active operations: on the 17th the Battalion embarked on S.S. *Champoilion* at Algiers. They disembarked at Naples on the 20th and three days later re-embarked on landing craft for Anzio.

On the 24th February 1944 the 14th Foresters joined the 2nd Foresters as part of VI Corps in the Anzio beachhead. The Officer state of the Battalion on that day was as follows:

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* The author has been unable to discover the exact number of casualties—owing to the many slightly wounded men who were not evacuated from the beachhead and who returned to duty after a short period in hospital and convalescence.

† 'Paiforce'—the name given to the British and Indian force in Persia and Iraq at that time.

Commanding Officer	Lieut-Colonel M. Redmayne
2nd-in-Command	Major S. G. Dickson (Royal Scots)
Adjutant	Captain E. A. J. Mercer
Quartermaster	Captain G. Smith
Company Commanders:	
A	Major H. W. King
B	Major P. Rowley
C	Major F. G. Walker
D	Major R. M. Dick
Support	Captain P. T. Carter
HQ	Captain W. G. Yeomans

As already explained the Battalion was part of the 18th Infantry Brigade, the other units of which were the 1st Buffs and the 1st Yorkshire Dragoons. Soon after landing in the beachhead the 18th Brigade replaced the 24th Guards Brigade in the 1st Division.

On first arrival the 14th Foresters, together with the 1st Yorkshire Dragoons, formed part of VI Corps reserve and worked in close co-operation with the 1st American Armoured Division. For a fortnight these two Battalions carried out a number of reconnaissances for possible counter-attacks, one of which was given the code name 'Forrester', a delicate, if mis-spelt, compliment by the staff of the VI United States Corps.

It will be remembered that on the night of the 6/7th March the 40th Royal Marine Commando had taken over in the 'Boot' from the battered 2nd Foresters. On the evening of the 10th March the 14th Foresters took over from the Commandos. Here the Battalion faced most of the difficulties which had confronted the 2nd Battalion. Although reports stated that the gully which ran across the leg of the 'Boot' was occupied by a standing patrol, the 14th Battalion's men were not able to reach this position, which was found to be held by the enemy. The Germans were also strongly entrenched in positions on the right which outflanked the 'Boot' and thus enabled them to harass it from both front and flank.

On the 11th March an attack was made on the junction of the two gullies; but it failed, as did another attack put in after dark.

The situation was depressing. The Commanding Officer, Lieut-Colonel Redmayne, has since written: 'Nothing seemed to have any tactical sense. There was little or no actual support between platoons, certainly not between companies, and indeed in most cases sections were fighting a private war of their own. It was a company commanders' battle, and they struggled desperately to find some way of evening things up with an enemy who appeared to hold all the cards.'

On the night of the 13th/14th March the Brigade tried to winkle the enemy out of a nearby gully called the 'Caronte'. To the right, the Yorkshire Dragoons were to reach the far bank of the gully.

To begin with all went well. There was plenty of artillery support—even though, owing to the closeness of the enemy, it did not reach the forward positions. As the attack developed, however, fortune began to change. B Company, then commanded by Captain J. Fox, was to have outflanked the objective. At the last minute heavy Spandau fire frustrated this course. Then a handful of prisoners came back. But in the dark the Foresters lost their way. After reaching its first objective, the leading platoon came under heavy fire. The second platoon lost itself completely.

Further to the right A Company had reached its objective, but was immediately turned back by terrific fire. The Yorkshire Dragoons had no better luck. They, too, reached their objective, but by morning they had been driven off again.

During the night Major R. M. Dick was killed whilst directing the D Company mortars.

The days which followed were spent patrolling and reinforcing the positions in the 'Boot'. On the night of the 24th/25th March the Battalion was relieved. It had been in the line for fourteen days and casualties had been heavy—the more so, perhaps, from inexperience.

During April and for the best part of May the 14th Foresters carried out the normal routine of trench warfare. There were many minor incidents, but none of major importance and at no time did they experience such tough conditions as their first spell in the 'Boot'. There were casualties, but they were not unduly heavy. Among the killed was Captain D. Forder, of C Company—a very courageous and popular officer.

On the 25th May 1944—the day of the link up with the main body of the Fifth Army—the 14th Foresters took over a sector of the front from the 179th American Infantry Regiment.

In the second week in May the Eighth and Fifth Armies had attacked in the Cassino sector. Two days later Free French forces broke the Gustav Line and captured Monte Maio, the highest peak in the Aurenci Mountains. This outflanked the entire Gustav Line. By the 19th May Allied troops had passed the German winter line and on the 23rd the VI Corps took the offensive from the Anzio beachhead. Marshal Kesselring withdrew his forces rapidly in face of this threat from front and flank, and proceeded to occupy the Gothic Line—170 miles to the North.

On the 25th May news reached the troops of the 1st Division that the VI Corps had linked up with advanced troops of the Fifth Army. The Anzio Beachhead no longer existed.

The Anzio landing was one of those operations which did not go according to plan. It had been hoped to achieve a quick link up betweeen VI Corps and the main army, followed by a rapid advance on Rome and a big bag of prisoners. It proved difficult, however, to catch the Germans out twice by the same methods. They had been surprised at Salerno, but at Anzio they reacted very quickly and put up a stubborn resistance. The result was a slogging match which lasted for more than four months and cost the Allies very heavy casualties.

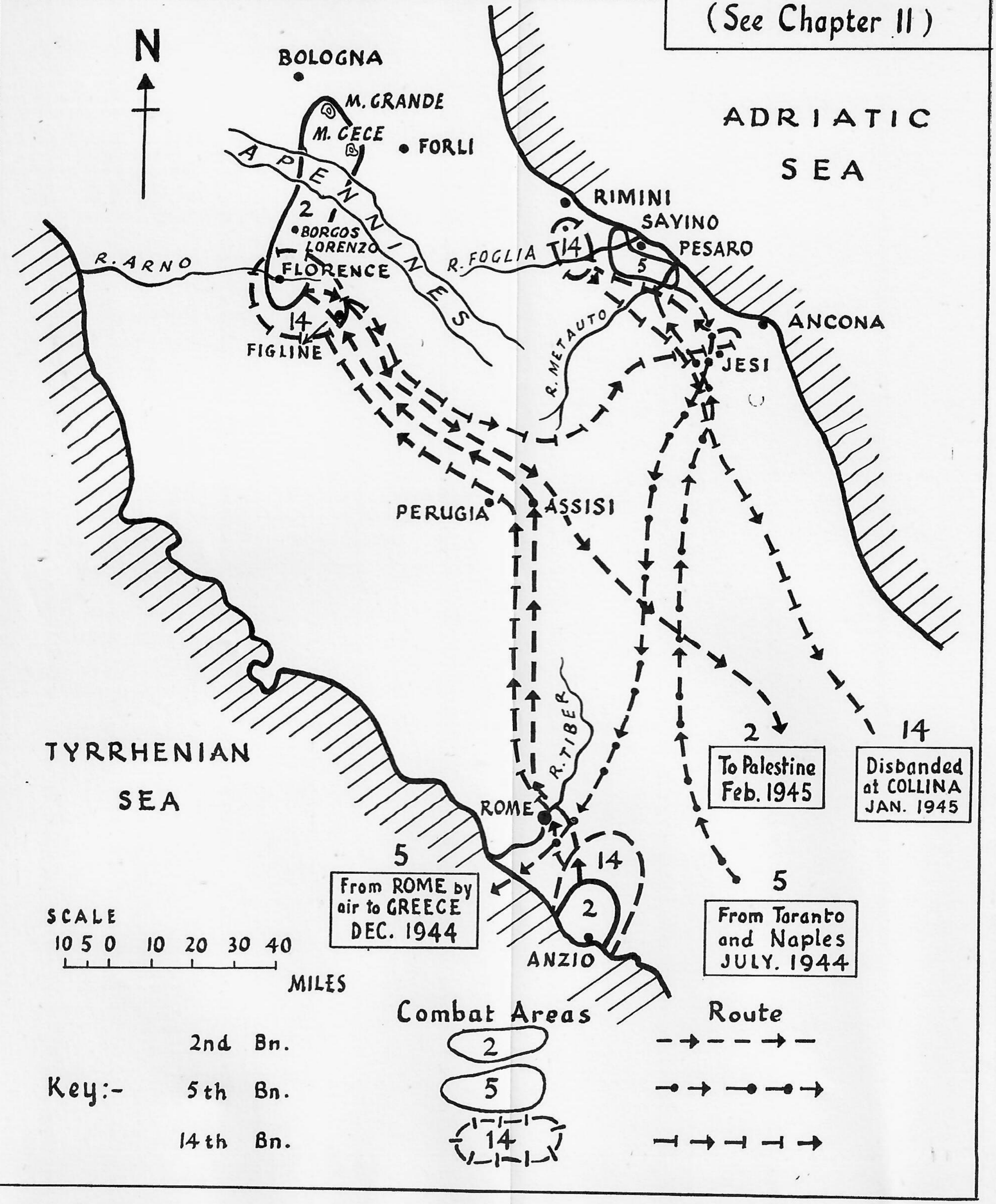
For the Sherwood Foresters Anzio was an epic in the story of their Regiment.

CENTRAL ITALY

SKETCH MAP
No XIV

(2nd, 5th and 14th Battalions) May 1944 to February 1945

(See Chapter II)


N
BOLOGNA
M. GRANDE
M. CECE
FORLI
APENNINES
ADRIATIC SEA
RIMINI
SAVINO
PESARO
ANCONA
JESI
2
BORGOS LORENZO
R. ARNO
FLORENCE
R. FOGLIA
14
5
R. METAUTO
14
FIGLINE
PERUGIA
ASSISI
R. TIBER
TYRRHENIAN SEA
ROME
ANZIO
2
14
2
To Palestine Feb. 1945
14
Disbanded at COLLINA JAN. 1945
5
From ROME by air to GREECE DEC. 1944
5
From Taranto and Naples JULY. 1944
SCALE
10 5 0 10 20 30 40
MILES
Key:-
Combat Areas
Route
2nd Bn.
2
5th Bn.
5
14th Bn.
14

CHAPTER 11

ITALY—III

OPERATIONS FOLLOWING THE CAPTURE OF ROME, AND THE ATTACK ON THE GOTHIC LINE

May 1944 to February 1945

(See Sketch Map XIV)

In the last chapter we saw how two Forester Battalions fought in the desperate battles of the Anzio Beachhead—the 2nd Battalion throughout and the 14th Battalion in the latter stages. We have followed the story to the 25th May 1944, when troops from the Beachhead joined up with men from the main body of the Fifth Army which, together with the Eighth Army, had been advancing slowly, and against stubborn resistance, up the calf of the leg of Italy.

There was still much fighting to be done. Rome fell on the 5th June: thereafter there was to be an opposed advance to the Arno and some stubborn fighting before the Gothic Line was reached and finally breached. The German leaders displayed their usual skill, and the German soldier his customary courage in adversity.

Three Battalions of the Sherwood Foresters took part in this phase of the Italian Campaign—the 2nd and 14th from the Anzio Beachhead, until the 14th was disbanded in January 1945, and the 2nd until February 1945 when it went to Palestine. The 5th, which had left Italy in February 1944 (see Chapter 9), returned with the 46th Division at the end of June 1944, but departed again the following December for Greece.

2nd Battalion

On the night of the 26/27th May 1944 the 2nd Foresters were relieved by the 1st King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry of the 5th Division. This was part of a plan for the latter Division to take over a portion of the 1st Division's front, so that the 1st would be available for a pursuit rôle. Thus, on the morning of the 27th the Battalion found itself in the B Echelon area at two hours' notice to take part in a mortorized advance.

About this time some changes in the Officer position came about. Major D. E. B. Whittle went from command of C to command of S Company and Captain M. H.

Fauvelle (soon to be promoted Major) became O.C. C Company. Captain R. Bennett went as Headquarter Company Commander, an appointment which he held for the rest of the war. An Officer state, dated 3rd June 1944, which is included in the War Diary, makes interesting reading. Of the 35 combatant officers in the Battalion only Lieut-Colonel Hackett, Major Whittle, and four others were Foresters. The remainder came from 15 different British Regiments (K.O.Y.L.I., Surreys, East Lancashires, Kings, East Yorkshires, Warwickshires, Leicestershires, Buffs, Berkshires, Devons, Royal Fusiliers, Dorests, Norfolks, Hampshires and Black Watch). In addition there were three from the Union of South Africa Defence Forces. But they were all good Foresters and proud of their temporary 'home'.

Three days after the Battalion's arrival in the B. Echelon area the enemy began withdrawing and the 5th Division—not the 1st as had been expected—began following up. This enabled parties of officers and men of the Foresters to go round some of the enemy positions in 'The Boot' and into Pantoni. Here they were able to confirm the German soldiers World War I reputation as an industrious digger and skilful constructor of field fortifications. The area was not a pleasant sight, the bodies of many British and German soldiers being still unburied.

On the 1st June the 2nd Foresters were ordered to concentrate in the notorious 'Factory' area. This was preparatory to a Brigade attack on a position some five miles to the North, where the 5th Division was held up.

The enemy was the Foresters' old antagonists, the fanatical 4th Paratroop Division. The Battalion moved forward from its start line at 12 noon and on the 3rd June in company with the King's Shropshire Light Infantry. B Company (right) was directed on the highest point of a ridge and D Company (left) made for a group of houses called 'l'Ovile'. D Company had little difficulty in securing their objective; but B were met with fairly heavy machine-gun fire and suffered casualties before capturing the feature with a spirited final rush, in which they got a good 'bag' of prisoners. The enemy regained one post, but were soon ejected by a counter-attack by B Company assisted by some men of D.

The casualty list in this action comprised 1 Officer and 9 Other Ranks killed and Major N. A. Ward (B Company) and 35 Other Ranks wounded.

Exploitation by C Company, hitherto held in reserve, began at once, and they pushed through to a gulley called 'Fossa Del Aquabuona' without meeting opposition. Patrols pushing still further forward during the night were unable to gain contact with the enemy.

On the 5th June a long move forward was made and the 2nd Foresters bivouacked in a cornfield. On this day American troops entered Rome.

After their arduous four-and-a-half months in the beachhead it was clear that the 1st Division required a period to rest and refit. It was to be nearly ten weeks before the Battalion went into action again.

On the 6th June 1944 British and American forces began landing on the Normandy coast and thus began the campaign which by mid-September was to carry the Allied Armies through Northern and Central France and part of the Low

Countries. In support of the campaign in North-West Europe it had been planned that another Allied landing should be made on the South coast of France. A good many of the troops for this landing were taken from Italy, thus further weakening the Allied Command there, which had already provided Divisions for the 'Overlord' operation. The Southern assault by American and French forces took place between Nice and Marseilles on the 15th August but, of course, the units involved had to be withdrawn from combat in Italy some time before. This withdrawal of troops from General Alexander's command—which was followed by more in the Spring of 1945—was the chief factor in the comparatively slow progress of the Allies in Italy for some months to come.

On the 7th June the 2nd Foresters moved into a better bivouac area. For three days parties visited Rome, which was only a few miles distant. On the 10th work began again. To the uninitiated it might seem that, after several months stern fighting accompanied by heavy casualties, it would be reasonable to spend some weeks of any period out of the battle area in rest and recreation. Those with war experience know better. There may be two or three days of relaxation; but very soon there begins the process of reorganization, absorbing new personnel, learning new weapons and techniques and improving the units' knowledge of old ones, collective training and perhaps planning for the next battle. There may be roads to be constructed, or old ones to be repaired, and other work of a similar kind. Those insatiable employers of Infantry labour, the Sappers, may make big demands! A 'rest' period in an active theatre of operations always belies its name. So it was with the 2nd Foresters: by the 12th June activities of this sort were in full swing.

On the 23rd the Battalion moved out of bivouac to the Castel di Decima, an ancient fortress, about eight miles from Rome, which had been a German Divisional Headquarters.

About this time some reinforcements arrived, and as a result it was decided to reintroduce the four Rifle Company organization. Captain P. A. Hewitt was given the task of transforming the A Company cadre into a full strength Company. Captain M. F. H. Kirk, a newcomer, took over command of B Company and was promoted to Major in place of Major Ward, who had been wounded in the last action.

The first week at Castel di Decima was spent in Company training; followed by combined tank training with the 10th Hussars; then mountain warfare and Brigade training. It had been planned that during the last week or so as many men as possible should be sent to holiday camps situated around the beautiful Lake Albano, set in the crater of the Liziali Mountains, about eighteen miles from Rome. Unfortunately the pleasant life offered by these camps only lasted for two days, when the Battalion was recalled suddenly—but not altogether unexpectedly—to Castel di Decima.

The 6th August 1944, three hours before dawn, found the 2nd Foresters lined up in convoy outside the Castle ready to move North. By the evening of the same day they had arrived at Assisi, perched on the Perugian Hills, which was to be the

1st Division's concentration area for coming activities. Here one saw vehicles and men of the 46th Division and an Indian Division, and it soon became clear that this concentration of force was the first stage in the assault on the strong German position known as the 'Gothic Line'.

At this time the enemy front line ran from the mouth of the River Arno in the West, along the river to Florence and thence to the Adriatic coast South of Pesaro. This was not the main Gothic Line position; but what might be termed its outpost line. The positions there were not as well prepared as the Gothic Line itself—some miles further North. They were, however, formidable and sited, constructed and manned with customary German skill.

The Allied plan for assaulting this position committed the British Eighth Army to the Adriatic Sector and the American Fifth Army to the mountain route further West. Some British troops—among whom was the 1st Division with the 2nd Foresters—were, however, in the Fifth Army.

For a little more than two weeks in mid-August the Foresters were located just South of the River Arno, around Florence—sometimes in front line, at others in reserve. It was a quiet part of the front and very little of note occurred.

The high command was, however, planning a forced crossing of the Arno; but, as there was a strong suspicion that the enemy would slip away, extensive patrolling was ordered. On the 24th August, acting on information from civilians, a platoon of C Company, under Lieut. R. S. Hordern, crossed the Arno in daylight East of Florence. They found that the enemy had gone, and the platoon made its way to the high ground overlooking the river and occupied the village of Bagazzano. The rest of C Company, and the newly re-formed A Company, immediately forded the river and took up positions on the ridge. On the following day jeeps were taken across and later B Company relieved two Companies of the Royal Scots on the left of C Company. A Company of the K.S.L.I. was placed under the Foresters' command.

All this was done in a strange air of 'peace'. There was some light shelling, but Italian civilians were still in occupation of their homes, many going about their business as if nothing very unusual was happening. On the 27th civilians reported that the enemy was in occupation of the Castel di Poggio, situated on the next feature to the North. To check this a platoon of D Company, under Lieut. C. D. Salt was sent out to investigate. Enemy troops were found in some woods before the patrol reached the Castle. Other patrols sent out found all the dominating features occupied by Germans.

To its great disappointment the Battalion was relieved on the 29th, by the 11th Bn. The Lancashire Fusiliers and withdrew South of the Arno. It was the 2nd Foresters, however, who had led the 1st Division across the Arno.

On the 2nd September the Battalion moved North again to a reserve position behind the 1st Duke of Wellington's Regiment, who were advancing North-East of Florence. Two days were spent on the Monte Loro feature and on the 4th they relieved the 1st Hertfordshires just North of Fiesole.

In the middle of August Major S. L. A. Carter had rejoined, and resumed the appointment of 2nd-in-Command.

At Florence—through which the 2nd Foresters moved when relieving the 1st Hertfordshires—began the famous 'Arrow Route' leading North-East. Eventually this route, cleared by the 1st Division, was to run for fifty miles through Borgo San Lorenzo, Palazzuolo and Castel Bolognese to just outside Bologna.

For the next week the Battalion continued to advance against an enemy conducting a planned withdrawal to the Gothic Line. Opposition was encountered periodically, but it was usually overcome fairly quickly. There was some shelling and much hard marching and climbing.

During the night of the 11/12th September A and C Companies got a footing in the devastated village of Ronta, where the Apennines begin, and thus the Foresters were the first unit of the 1st Division to encounter the main Gothic Line. Later the Carrier Platoon surprised a party of Germans in another part of this village, killing three and capturing eleven. This fine piece of work earned Sergeant Cupitt the Military Medal.

The next morning the Dukes passed through the Battalion; but were met and halted by heavy fire as soon as they approached the mountains rising abruptly from the road North of Ronta.

The first big feature of the Apennines was known as Monte Giuvigliano, rising to a height of some 3000 feet. On the 14th September the Foresters attacked this position. The brunt of the attack fell on B (Captain M. F. H. Kirk) and C (Major M. H. Fauvelle) Companies, who led the attack supported by the whole Divisional Artillery. By 9.30 a.m. C Company reported having seized a feature about two-thirds the way to the summit and taken a few prisoners. On pressing on they encountered very heavy fire and ran into barbed wire. At midday the two Companies, both low in numbers owing to casualties, renewed the assault, but could make no headway. The Battalion then dug in and remained in possession of the ground until relieved by the 1st K.S.L.I. the next day. In this action Lieuts. R. S. Hordern and P. Swainson (both of C Company) won the Military Cross.

The Battalion spent the next twelve days around the village of Sagginale. Here B Company was placed on a cadre basis and the remaining Companies reinforced by men of B.

Meanwhile the 2nd and 66th Brigades had made good progress chasing the enemy through the mountains.

On the 30th September the 2nd Foresters moved North by lorry and march route to Palazzuola. By the evening they were concentrated near the village ready to lead the advance. The next two days were spent in strenuous operations in drenching rain, during which Companies leap-frogged through each other to secure a number of heights.

The afternoon of 3rd October brought C Company, who were in the lead, close to the mighty Monte Cece feature, thought to be the key to the enemy's whole position. By midnight the Company had occupied one of the twin peaks on the summit, but at 2 a.m. (4th) they were violently counter-attacked and driven off.

The next night (4/5th) A Company, in conjunction with the 1st K.S.L.I., again occupied part of the summit. Again they were violently counter-attacked and Captain P. A. Hewitt and his men were forced back, suffering severe casualties. The Battalion then dug in below the hill.

On the following night the 1st Duke of Wellingtons mounted a Battalion attack on Monte Cece, and captured and held it; but lost their gallant Commanding Officer, Lieut-Colonel F. P. St. M. Shiel. In this action Private R. Burton of The Dukes earned the Victoria Cross.

The next few days were spent by the Foresters in patrolling the exposed right flank; but on the 12th they were relieved by the 2nd Royal Scots. During the nine days' rest which followed Lieut-Colonel Hackett was admitted to hospital with jaundice and his place was taken by Lieut-Colonel J. K. Windeatt from the 78th Division. The Battalion was in a seriously depleted state and had lost many of its best leaders. Among new arrivals were Major M. G. Dobbin (posted to command C Company) Major F. G. L. Clarke and Captain P. N. Davis.

This phase of operations in Italy was an Infantry and Artillery war. The tank was of little use in this country of steep hills, and motor vehicles were often unable to negotiate the few roads—which had usually been destroyed, or mined, by the enemy. In the forward areas all supplies had either to be carried by men or on pack animals. The evacuation of casualties was always a difficult, and dangerous, business.

On the 22nd October the Foresters moved forward again to Pallazzuolo. As before part of the journey had to be done on foot over a difficult route, along which the only form of transport was the pack animal. Moving forward from Palazzuolo they relieved the 1st Loyals on and around Monte Scrappa. On the following day D Company occupied another feature to the North. In this move the Company Commander, Major W. L. Slingsby, stepped on a mine and was seriously wounded.

The next two weeks were spent in 'making ground' by moving forward to 'the next hill' whenever the opportunity offered, in patrolling and occasional interchanges of Company areas and posts with other units.

On the 5th November the Battalion was relieved and on the following day moved back to Borgo San Lorenzo for a short rest. Rumours had been rife that the 1st Division was to move West and take over from American troops in the Monte Grande area, to enable our Allies to concentrate for an advance on Bologna. This proved to be correct and on the 11th November the 2nd Foresters moved up to relieve American troops on Monte Grande itself.

By 11 p.m. the troops were in position—A Company on Monte Grande, C to the left and D in reserve with Battalion Headquarters. Enemy observation of the position was good, and his artillery and mortar fire accurate and at times heavy. Casualties were numerous, particularly in A Company. On the 18th the Foresters were relieved by the 1st Loyals and spent the next ten days in a reserve area about 3000 yards behind the front positions.

On the night of the 28/29th November the enemy attacked and captured a neighbouring feature, Monte Castellaro held by the 2nd Royal Scots. After many orders and counter-orders, the Foresters were given the task of retaking the feature.

The plan was for A Company to start the attack, and for D Company to come in an hour later from the left flank. C Company would remain in reserve behind Monte Grande.

At 1 a.m. (30th November) A Company crossed the start line. It was raining hard and very dark. Rain saved many lives that night, as most of the enemy mortar bombs failed to explode on the soft ground. Enemy fire was heavy and casualties occurred, but A Company pressed on. When within about 200 yards of the objective the fire increased in accuracy. The Company was now very weak and badly scattered. Captain J. W. A. Masters, the Company Commander, realizing that there was no hope of reaching the summit, ordered the survivors to return to the start line. Later the Commanding Officer ordered them to get under cover, behind Monte Grande, before dawn.

In the meantime D Company on the left had run into unexpected difficulties of terrain. The hillside on their front was so steep, and some flat parts so flooded by rain, that it was found impossible to negotiate the country in the dark. Heavily shelled and mortared, they too were withdrawn behind Monte Grande before it became light.

That night (30th November/1st December) the Battalion was relieved by the 1st Hertfordshire Regiment and after a march through mud, past 'mule-head', they were picked up by transport and taken back to Borgo San Lorenzo.

Conspicuous in the Castellaro attack was Lieut. V. C. W. Sudbury.* This officer had been captured with the 1st Battalion at Tobruk. Attempting to escape in North Africa he was recaptured; but later got away from a prison camp in Italy and eventually joined the 2nd Battalion, where he was posted to A Company.

By this time the Italian winter was at its height. It rained or snowed frequently, the streams and rivers were all in spate and the ground was a quagmire. In the hills it was very cold. Under these conditions large scale offensive operations were not practicable. Consequently the 2nd Foresters' last two months in Italy were spent in routine static warfare with no major actions. There is no need to describe these activities in detail.

On the 5th December the 2nd Foresters returned to Monte Calderaro. During the period there two incidents of interest occurred. On the 8th a wireless intercept indicated that an enemy patrol was advancing towards the Battalion position. A and D Companies 'stood to' and prepared to give the patrol a suitable reception. At 3 a.m. another intercept recorded the patrol leader as saying he was stuck in the mud of a deep gulley—well known to the Foresters as impassable—and was turning back.

On the 10th Major M. G. Dobbin (C Company) was much incensed by an enemy digging party, which was in full view, but just out of small arms range. He called for something heavier to deal with it and almost at once a flight of American

* At the time of writing Major V. C. W. Sudbury, M.C., is commanding the Regimental Depot at Derby.

fighter-bombers swooped over and 'pasted' the German diggers. It was never established whether the aircraft's appearance was fortuitous or as a result of the 'call'! If the latter, it was a model example of Anglo-American co-operation.

The 12th of December saw the Battalion back at Borgo San Lorenzo—now on the XII Corps axis of advance and a very busy place. As a *rest* area it had definitely deteriorated.

On the 17th December the 95th moved up to Frasinetto, in relief of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders. There followed some days of very active patrolling, which included a brush with the enemy by an A Company patrol, in which a Forester N.C.O. was captured and one man wounded.

Three days before the Christmas of 1944 heavy snow fell and in a very short time it was two feet deep. White clothing, string vests and windproof clothing had already been issued and were taken into use.

In the circumstances the customary visit by the Commanding Officer to Christmas dinners had to be modified. Nevertheless, starting before dawn and finishing in the late evening, Lieut-Colonel Windeatt visited every slit trench and sub-unit Headquarters, and personally wished every man a Happy Christmas. By tacit mutual agreement there was little firing, or other warlike activities.

A period of rest between the 1st and 7th January 1945 was followed by another nine days at Frasinetto. This was to be the 2nd Foresters last spell in the line. For some time there had been rumours that the 1st Division—long overdue for a complete rest—was going to the Middle East. This news was received with mixed feelings. Victory was in sight and most members of the Battalion would have liked to see the enemy really on the run, and to have marched through Bologna and Venice—possibly into Austria.

This was not to be. On the 13th Lieut-Colonel Cole, the Commander of the 11/338th Infantry Regiment, United States Army, came up to arrange the final relief of the 95th. He was much interested in the Battalion's system of defence, and greatly impressed by the quality of the British 'compo' ration. Colonel Cole and his Officers and men were most helpful and the relief was carried out in the best traditions of Anglo-American co-operation and friendship.

By 10 p.m. on the 16th January the 2nd Foresters had withdrawn from close contact with the enemy in Italy for the last time. They were the last Battalion in the 1st Division to be relieved in the front line.

On the 20th they took their last look at the Apennines and Borgo San Lorenzo and moved South to the village of Tavernelle in the Umbrian Hills. Seventeen days were spent in this very pleasant place.

About this time advanced parties were sent off to Palestine where the 1st was to relieve the 5th Division. Finally—after nine days in a Transit Camp outside Taranto the Battalion sailed from that port aboard the *Indrapoora* on the 18th February 1945.

It was in this way that the 2nd Battalion finished its fighting career in World War II—which started five years before in the Maginot Line in France.

This is a suitable place to mention two outstanding personalities in the 2nd

Foresters—the Rev. H. O. Jones, its devoted Padre, who served with it from 1941 to 1946; and the Quartermaster, Lieut. A. Sargent (1943 to 1946).

14th Battalion

We left the 14th Foresters (Chapter 10) having taken over a sector of the front in the Anzio Beachhead from the 3rd Battalion of the 179th U.S. Infantry Regiment on the 25th May 1944—the day that Beachhead troops linked up with the main body of the 5th Army. It will be remembered that the Battalion was in the 18th Brigade—with the 1st Buffs and 1st Yorkshire Dragoons.

On the 27th patrol reports indicated that the enemy on the Foresters' front had withdrawn, and at once the Battalion began to advance. This movement was carried out with some caution, however, owing to the presence of many hidden mines and some shelling. By the evening of the 28th a considerable amount of ground had been gained and the forward Companies had reached the important centre of Aprillia. This was not accomplished without heavy casualties—for an operation of this kind. These amounted to about 130, including Captain J. B. S. Fox (missing), Lieut. G. Newton (wounded by a mine) and Captain P. Crookenden (mortally wounded). Fortunately, however, a large proportion of the casualties were only slightly wounded. Many were from shell fire and mines when moving up a depression known as the Wadi Ficcocia.

From the 29th May until the 2nd June the Battalion stood fast in the Aprillia area; but on the 3rd the advance continued against light, but not negligible, resistance. On the following day twelve prisoners (of the 4th Para. Division) were taken at Piano Di Frasso. The Battalion entered Acilia, which was found to be unoccupied, on the 5th and it was here that they heard of the fall of Rome.

On the following day they were withdrawn from battle, and were to remain in the Acilia area until the 4th August. This period of two months out of contact with the enemy was spent in reorganizing and training.

On the 24th July 1944 Lieut-Colonel M. Redmayne left the Battalion on promotion to command the 66th Infantry Brigade and was succeeded by Lieut-Colonel G. P. Gofton-Salmond. Major D. H. Kelly was later (6th August) posted as 2nd-in-Command.

Meanwhile the battle front had moved many miles to the North on the line of the River Arno, and on the 4th August the 14th Foresters left Acilia for the neighbourhood of Assisi. Figline was reached on the 7th and after dark on the 8th they arrived at Villa Lamberti, South-East of Florence. Here they immediately took over a front line position from the left Battalion of the 12th Brigade (4th Division). The relief was completed by 1 a.m. on the 9th and patrols were at once sent out to gain contact with flank units—the 2/4th Hampshires (right) and the 1st Buffs (left).

On the 11th D Company carried out a demonstration along the South bank of the Arno, to distract the enemy's attention while other units in the vicinity crossed the river. On the following day Forester patrols forded the river with difficulty. Opposition was encountered and a few casualties were suffered—some from drowning.

Early on the 14th the Battalion was relieved by the 1st Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders and withdrew to the B Echelon area at Figline. This was a preliminary to a move to another area of operations. The 18th Brigade was to come under command of the 1st Armoured Division operating along the East coast of Italy near Ancona, and on the 20th the Foresters moved by lorry to an area just South of that place. There they stayed until the 1st September, when an operational move forward began—to just short of the village of San Savino. This village was to be the scene of two bloody attacks by the 14th Foresters and, as it turned out, it was also to be their last fight.

The preliminaries for the first attack began on the evening of the 5th when the Battalion left the assembly area. At 1.30 a.m. the following morning B Company began the assault from the South. On entering the village bitter fighting started. There was much confusion in the dark and the arrangements for supporting fire did not work as well as they might have done—due mainly to the short time that had been available for reconnaissance and planning. Nevertheless C Company hung on to the Southern part of the village, capturing some fifty Germans (among them four officers) and killing many more. At 3 a.m. C Company passed through B. Good progress was made in house-to-house fighting and some prisoners were taken. Soon, however, the enemy put in a strong counter-attack and C Company was pushed back; but the attack was held when two platoons of D Company were sent up as reinforcements. Just before dawn a Company of the Yorkshire Dragoons, with a squadron of tanks, put in another attack, but it was not successful.

With the help of the tanks the position was maintained until 10 p.m., when it was taken over by the Yorkshire Dragoons and the Foresters were withdrawn. This ended the first attempt to capture San Savino.

On the 8th the 14th Battalion relieved two forward Companies of the 1st Buffs, and were in turn relieved by the 1st King's Royal Rifle Corps on the 10th September. They then returned to the B Echelon area where plans were put in hand for another attack on the village.

The second attack on San Savino was a much more carefully planned affair than the first. There was ample time for reconnaissance, the selection of objectives and arrangements for supporting fire. The attack began at 5.30 a.m. on the 13th. As on the previous occasion desperate house-to-house fighting took place, but good progress was made and by 12.30 p.m. the village had been cleared and consolidated. Heavy casualties were inflicted on the enemy and a number of prisoners taken.

In the first attack the Foresters' casualties were around one hundred; but they were much lighter in the second—1 Officer (Lieut. A. Bellfield) and 5 Other Ranks killed and 2 Officers and 31 Other Ranks wounded. A comparison of the degree of success, and the casualty lists, in these two operations shows clearly the wisdom of giving units plenty of time for preparation for an attack of this kind.

The Foresters were not very pleased to hear, a few hours later, on the B.B.C., that San Savino had been captured by Ghurkas—a report which earned the unit the temporary title of 'White Ghurkas'. These fine operations had not been made easier by the very heavy rain which fell in that part of Italy throughout August 1944.

The Battalion was withdrawn on the 15th to an area immediately in rear. The 14th Bn. The Sherwood Foresters' fighting days were over.

On the 22nd September orders were issued for the reduction of the unit to a cadre strength of 5 Officers and 60 Other Ranks, and as a first step a large draft was sent to the 139th Brigade (46th Division), which numbered the 5th Foresters among its units.

By the 28th they had moved into billets at Collina and there it became clear that the reduction to cadre strength was a preliminary to disbandment. The process of 'winding up' continued. On the 21st December Lieut-Colonel Gofton-Salmond relinquished command to Major D. Wallace. On the 18th January 1945 the last vehicles and stores were handed over and the Battalion ceased to exist.

Compared to many units the 14th Foresters' fighting life in World War II was a short one; but in two years they earned a great reputation for skill and toughness.

Between October 1942 and October 1944 the Battalion suffered the following casualties.

	Killed	*Wounded*	*Missing*
Officers	16	25	2
Other ranks . .	158	405	23

The small number of missing, in such a big casualty list, is the measure of the unit's fighting spirit.

Among the decorations earned were: 1 Distinguished Service Order, 5 Military Crosses and 12 Military Medals.

5th Battalion

At the end of February 1944 (see Chapter 9) the 5th Foresters—with the rest of the 139th Brigade (46th Division)—had left Italy for Egypt. The *Ascania*, carrying the Battalion, docked at Port Said on the 26th February and on the following day they moved to Camp 41 at Qassassin. The war diary records that during the voyage many men had become lice infested and that one of Lieut-Colonel J. R. Welchman's first acts on reaching Qassassin was to arrange for a one hundred per cent bath and disinfestation parade.

In the next few months the Foresters were to experience several moves. The 25th March found them at Haifa in Palestine. On the 11th April a move was made to Ar Rama, in the hills North of Nazareth, a very good training area. On the 11th May they went to Mazar, near Damascus, in Syria, where a big exercise, lasting several days, took place.

The move of the 46th Division from Italy had been part of the High Command's plan for giving battle-weary divisions a rest in the Middle East with opportunities for local leave, to refit and to train. The time had now come to return to battle and by the 16th June 1944 the 5th Foresters were back in Qassassin. On the 27th they were embarking at Port Said in the *Sobieski* (A, D and Support Companies) and *Britannic* (B, C and H.Q. Companies). The ships arrived at Naples and Taranto respectively on the 2nd July and the Battalion began its second spell of service in Italy.

By the 6th July 1944 the Battalion had moved by rail to Pignataro, and this was followed on the 17th by another move to a forward area at Bevagna.

On the 25th the whole of the 139th Brigade, under Brigadier A. P. Block, went by lorry to Perugia airfield where, on the following day, they were inspected by His Majesty King George VI.

The Battalion remained in the Bevagna area until the 21st August training and 'shaking down' to conditions in the Italian theatre.

On the 10th August the 46th Division joined the V Corps, under which it had fought in North Africa. The task of the Corps, together with the 1st Canadian Corps, was to break the famous Gothic Line, which the Germans had constructed; but which, owing to the speed of the Allied advance North, was still incomplete when they assaulted it.

The 46th Division was to operate in the Adriatic sector.

During the 22nd and 23rd August the 5th Foresters moved forward to Catobaglie, and orders for the operation were issued on the evening of the 23rd.

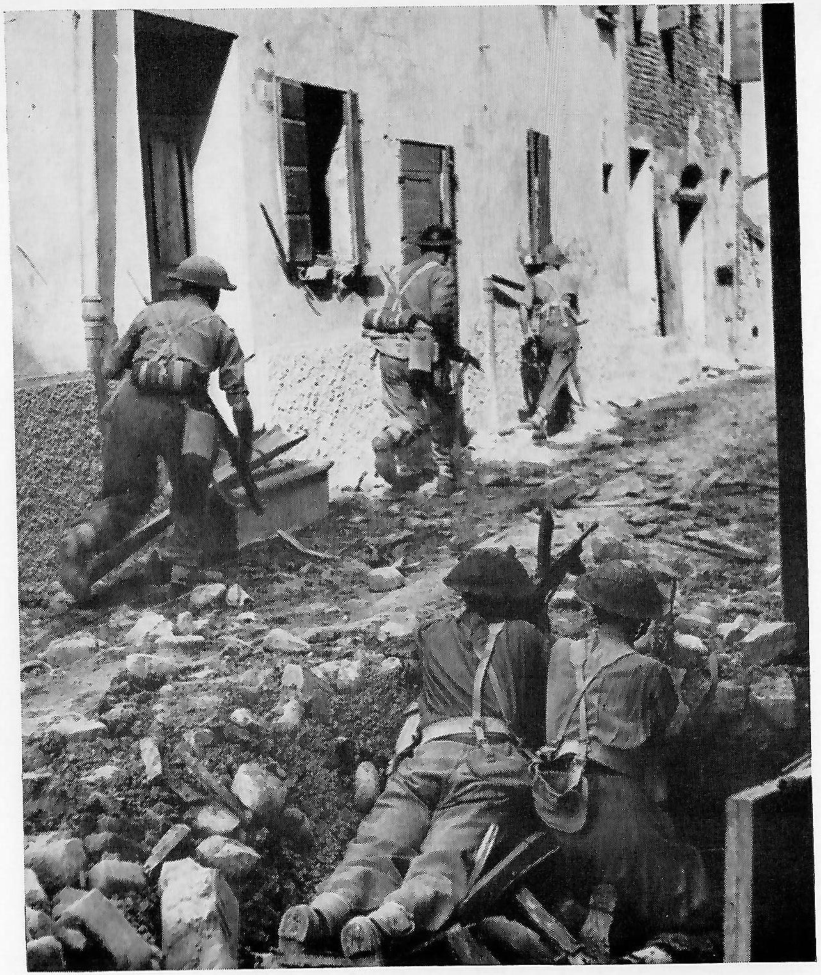
The River Metauro enters the sea some miles south of Pesaro. Crossing the narrow coastal plain, it winds its way gently from the Apennines. The 128th Brigade was to cross the Metauro first, and reach the hamlet of Montefelino. The 139th Brigade was to cross afterwards, and push ahead to Isola del Piano—about three miles North-East of Montefelino. The operation was scheduled to begin at dawn on the 26th August.

During the night of the 25th/26th the 128th Brigade crossed the river and reached its objective. At 7 a.m. on the 26th the 46th Reconnaissance Regiment started across and D Company of the Foresters was ordered to follow it.

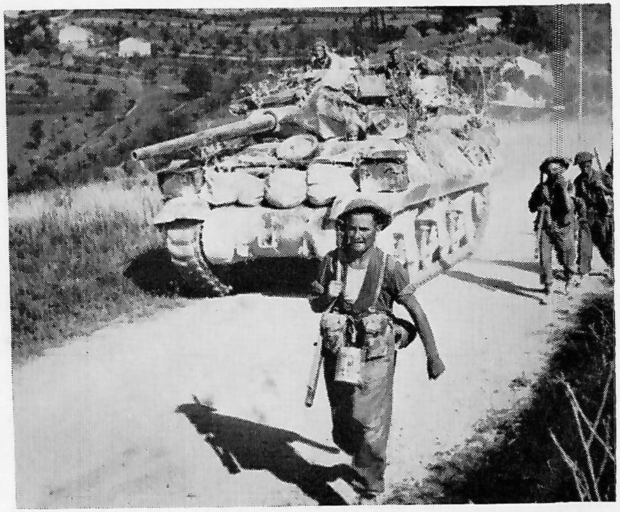
German units were soon reported to be on the far bank. D Company, on coming ashore, was sniped at from a nearby hillock, but the Company went into the assault and drove off the enemy.

The remainder of the Battalion then came across the river. By 7.15 p.m. all the companies were across and the advance began. They moved off cautiously up a road. They had not gone far when they discovered that a large crater had demolished the centre of the track. It was hard to find a way round, but after a while they went forward again.

The first four days of the battle were without serious encounter. The enemy was already in retreat from his outpost line, relying on the use of artillery to slow up the advancing Allies. Il Montigno, Monte Fabri, and other features, however, fell at a high cost to the enemy. British casualties were negligible.



Italy, 1944
Men of the 5th Battalion on the road to Petriane—August 1944



Italy, 1944
In the outskirts of S. Clemente

Italy, 1944
Troops in action in the S. Savino area

It was obvious that the Germans had been forced back upon the Gothic Line in the Allies' time, and not in their own. On the afternoon of the 29th August Forester patrols went down to the banks of the Foglia. They were unmolested. They found the enemy still laying mines on the far bank, apparently unaware of the nearness of the British forces.

Next day the Foresters were ordered across the river. A patrol led by Lieut. H. E. Buttery reached the opposite bank without opposition, and pushed ahead to an abandoned farm. There it was held up for a moment by snipers and machine-gun fire. Undaunted it moved on for about two hundred yards, making to the North of the farm. It was held up again.

A Company had meanwhile set off across the river. On the way it had come under mortar fire and sustained a few casualties. Then it reached the farm, and joined forces with Buttery and his men.

The Germans were occupying five houses on the lower slopes of the stately Monte Vecchio. The enemy had excellent observation posts from which to direct artillery and mortar fire on to the Foresters. Under cover of the smoke, Buttery and his platoon rushed over the main road towards the outer defences. The remainder of A Company followed. The speed of the attack took the enemy by surprise; those in the house showed every sign of wishing to surrender. There were, however, German spandaus concealed in the other houses and in various isolated positions. Immediately Lieut. B. W. J. Wright and six men went off to silence the guns on the left. They were supported by a fire section commanded by the platoon sergeant—Sgt. L. Hunter.

Wright and his men doubled through a minefield, raced over the hard ground, and staggered to the top of a spur: the machine-gun was silenced. Then they pushed on up the spur, and another gun, hidden in a farm at the top, shared the same fate. The support section followed up. On the way it liquidated three more machine-guns.

The entire action was characterized by a spirit of daring and initiative. Wright was awarded the Military Cross for his share in the events. Buttery, who had borne the brunt of the earlier encounters, had also fought magnificently. It was his performance in this and many similar situations which made his death later in this campaign such a sad loss to the Battalion.

By now light was failing and Wright was compelled to hold back. In the meantime D Company, under Major B. Williamson, had crossed the river. It made contact with A Company at dusk. Wright's platoon had discovered the soft patch in the sinews of this small front. It was over on the left, and a platoon from D Company was sent off to join him: thus holding the start line for an attack on the village of which these houses formed the outskirts. Another platoon from D Company sneaked off into the night to reconnoitre it. It was now quite dark, but by this time the Foresters had a footing on Monte Vecchio. After about 800 yards of level ground to the north of the river, the hill begins to rise steeply to about six hundred feet. The gradient is about two in three. There are no trees on its barren sides; no welcoming depressions to conceal the intruder, and viewed from well-sited defensive positions it was a death trap. The village is surrounded by an unscaleable wall—some ten feet or more high. It is more like a mountain 'keep' than a village.

To the West of the village there is a cemetery, and that on its own provided a natural defensive position, ready to deny access by the road, which is the only approach. From these positions the Germans must have been able to see even the smallest movements which took place on the journey from Monte Fabri to the farmhouse at the top of the spur.

At 8 p.m. that evening it was decided to reinforce Wright's soft spot on the left flank. B Company, commanded by Major J. B. Innes, was sent up the spur to contact A and D Companies. B Company set out, but owing to wireless failure nothing was heard of it until 5 a.m. At that hour a patrol, which had been sent out to find it, discovered that the soldiers had walked into a minefield. Among the casualties was Major Innes himself, who was badly wounded in both feet.

B Company had been selected for the main attack on the village, but in the dark it was impossible to regroup the scattered and depleted platoons. Thus it fell to A and D Companies to carry out the assault. C Company, led by Major H. C. W. Tulloch, was sent off to reinforce them. Before C Company reached the forward troops, Williamson had decided that a co-ordinated effort between the *two* companies would suffice to carry out the task. He, therefore, went forward into the attack.

At 5.40 on the morning of August 31st the Divisional artillery put down a concentration of shells lasting for thirty minutes on the village and on the cemetery to the West. Under cover of this heavy bombardment the infantry attack went in from the West. Two platoons of D Company reached the village. A Company followed: then withdrew slightly, for it was catching up too quickly with the artillery barrage. Immediately the gunfire stopped. There was a lull and then the crackle of small arms: the haphazard explosions of grenades. A and D Companies entered the village which, after a short spell of close-quarter fighting, was captured.

The casualties suffered by the Battalion in this operation were surprisingly slight. Only 6 men were killed and 43 wounded; 30 Germans were killed and 75 taken prisoner.

The following is a copy of a letter received later by the Commanding Officer from the Divisional Commander, in connection with this action.

A letter from Major General J. L. I. Hawkesworth, C.B., C.B.E., D.S.O. commanding the 46th Division

DO/JLIH

Headquarters,
46 Division,
C.M.F.
10 Sep 44

My Dear Welchman,

I have now been able to get a true picture of what your battalion achieved in the fighting for the Gothic Line and beyond.

I congratulate you and your battalion on a very fine performance. The skill, courage and initiative displayed by junior leaders and men alike were truly magnificent.

When history comes to be written I am sure that the storming of Monte Vecchio will rank among the many feats of arms in the annals of the Foresters.

Well done indeed.

Yours ever,

J. L. I. Hawkesworth.

Lt. Col. J. R. Welchman,
O.C. 5 Foresters.

During the next three days the Battalion consolidated its position on Monte Vecchio, and explored forward, into the Gothic Line. By the 4th September the soldiers were crossing the River Conea, escorted by tanks, and pressing on beyond. The Battalion moved off at 7 a.m. At first it contacted only isolated enemy positions. C Company pushed ahead, preceded by tanks, until it reached the village of Cevolabatte. Then it ran into light opposition. It dealt with it swiftly and decisively, aided by the tanks.

Information was received that the 138th Brigade was advancing towards Saint Cervino. The Foresters were to follow as quickly as possible. About 1.30 p.m. B Company, which was then leading, came under spandau fire. The Germans had held their fire until they could cover the whole company at once. This they did with six machine-guns, two of them only 100 yards away.

The Company dived for cover immediately, having received fifteen casualties—four of which turned out to be fatal. The escorting tanks put down a concentration of fire on the objective—a village called Il Trebio. They also castigated the nearby enemy positions with high explosives and machine-gun fire.

B Company was pinned down for about forty-five minutes. No. 10 platoon crawled off to deeper cover. The remaining men were divided into two parties: one under Lieut. Oliver and one under L/Sgt. Banton.

About 100 yards away there was a farmhouse in which the nearest German spandau was thought to be sited. The tanks drove the enemy out of this farm, and set two haystacks alight. Then the position fell without further opposition.

No. 10 platoon now rejoined the two parties, bringing with it a bag of six prisoners. The company moved on cautiously to the left, working its way in the cover of some scrub and a few outlying dwellings. No. 12 platoon cleared the houses, and No. 11 platoon went to ground, covering the village from the right. No. 10 platoon then went into the attack and, helped by a 'tank barrage', captured Il Trebio with small opposition. In this operation 27 prisoners were taken.

By 6th September the Battalion had been relieved and had moved back to a rearward area.

9th September was Salerno Day. Exactly one year before the 46th Division had first set foot in Italy. On this day every soldier wore an oak leaf in his cap: a symbol of the tree which was the 'flash' of the Division.

The main battle for the Gothic Line was over. In the course of twelve days' fighting three German divisions had been badly mauled by the units of the 46th Division. The British forces had advanced for over twenty-five miles through country well suited to defence. Enemy casualties included 830 prisoners; the dead were numerous. In the Division there had been more than 1000 casualties. It was a heavy price to pay, yet one which was demanded by the daring policy of rushing the line by 'blitzkrieg' methods. The only alternative policy would have been to submit to a period of protracted trench-warfare.

The last months of 1944 were spent creeping up the East coast of Italy, driving further and further towards the Plain of Lombardy. Enemy opposition was growing thinner; but still there were those swift counter-attacks, the shelling and the accurate fire by German infantry support weapons. Such names as Verucchio, Carpinieta, Coriano and Poggioberni appear in the War Diaries. It was hard work against an enemy whose morale was still unbroken. Each day 'The Oak', the Divisional newspaper, gave the number of prisoners captured by the Division. An average day's bag seems to have been in the neighbourhood of 50 to 60.

On the 20th October the 5th Foresters came out of action to S. Clemente for a long rest and on the 25th November moved still further back to Forli. Three days later came an order for a long move South. The 29th found them at Jesi and on the 30th they arrived at the Lidi Di Roma on the outskirts of Rome. Here it was revealed that the 46th Division was to proceed to Greece at once—partly by air and partly by sea.

The next thirty-six hours were spent in making arrangements for the personnel and light equipment of the Battalion to move in Dakota aircraft. For this purpose the unit had to be split up into 'loads' of fifteen men each.

On the 2nd and 3rd December the Foresters moved by air to Sedes airfield, near Salonika. The circumstances of their despatch at such short notice, and the story of their activities in Greece, will be told in the next chapter. The Battalion's campaigning days in World War II were over. They were to return to Italy later—just before the German surrender—for a short time; but that too is another story.

For the Sherwood Foresters Italy was the main battleground in the 1939–45 War, and it was there that the three most battle-scarred Battalions of the Regiment served with the greatest distinction. Salerno, Anzio, the Gothic Line, and many lesser battles and engagements, are names which will not be forgotten by the men of Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire—and some others from further afield—who fought with the 2nd, 5th and 14th Foresters.

6th, The Robin Hoods, 8th, 9th, 10th (30th), 12th, 13th, 15th, 50th (14th) and 70th (16th) (1st) Battalions and Depot.

CHAPTER 12

THEY ALSO SERVED

Other Battalions of the Sherwood Foresters and the Regimental Depot—1939 to 1945

This book deals mainly with the war-time activities of the Foresters. The emphasis is on the fighting, and in consequence the story is mostly of the Field Force Battalions in an Infantry rôle in active theatres of operations. There were, however, other Battalions, and the Regimental Depot, which played an essential part in the war effort. As will be apparent, from the individual description of the activities which follow, these units were in a variety of guises. Two went to India (one in a tank rôle), two were Anti-aircraft units and others spent the whole, or part, of the war in providing the Field Force Battalions with trained reinforcements.

It is the purpose of this chapter to tell, very briefly, the story of these units. In doing so there is, inevitably, a departure from the generally chronological basis of the book.

Before dealing with individual Battalions it will not be out of place to emphasize the very important part played by draft-finding units in the years 1939–45.

In total war the battle casualties, and wastage from sickness, are heavy. Moreover, there is a constant drain on units as personnel are withdrawn to help form new units, for the staff, as instructors at schools and other duties. If the Field Force units of a Regiment are to be maintained in an efficient state they must be constantly fed with well-trained men of high morale, and with the various ranks and specialists in the proper proportions.

In the First World War the main requirement was for men who were well disciplined, physically fit and able to handle the few simple weapons with which the Infantry of those days was armed.

By 1939 a higher standard was required. The Infantry soldier's weapons were by then more numerous and more complicated; and, in addition to weapons, he was required to handle a variety of other mechanical equipments—wireless sets, mines (including enemy mines) and vehicles of various kinds. Above all, even the lowest ranks had to be very well trained tactically for the difficult conditions of fast-moving warfare.

After the first few months of hostilities the efficiency of Field Force units depended, to a very great extent, on the quality of their supporting units at home.

The importance of the work of the draft-finding units can hardly be over-estimated. Their duties were often monotonous. They did not attract the public esteem, or glamour, associated with units serving in a theatre of operations overseas. Nevertheless, they played an essential rôle in turning the newly joined recruit into a skilled fighting soldier, fit to take his place in a Field Force unit. In this task the draft producing units of the Foresters were not found wanting.

The following is a very brief summary of the activities of the Battalions of the Regiment in these rôles in World War II.

6th Battalion (40th (Sherwood Foresters) S.L. Regiment, R.A.) (149th (Sherwood Foresters) Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, R.A.)

The 6th Foresters—in the guise of a Searchlight Regiment, and Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, Royal Artillery—served at home until August 1944. Up to May 1943 it was deployed in a searchlight rôle covering the Humber. In May 1943 the Regiment went to Hollywood, County Down, Northern Ireland, where it was converted into a Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment with the designation '149th Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, R.A.'. It did not stay long in Ireland, however, and in mid-July returned to England. The unit remained in East Anglia and the South of England until it went to France in the summer of 1944—being stationed at Colchester, Eastbourne, Bournemouth, Aldershot, Brighton, Hove and parts of Suffolk.

The War Diary of the Regiment tells of many engagements with enemy aircraft, which when the 'blitz' was at its height were part of the day-to-day routine of an anti-aircraft unit. It was exacting work which required a very high standard of technical skill and discipline.

In February 1944 the composition of the Regiment underwent a drastic change. The 501st and 503rd Batteries left the Regiment and were replaced by two previously independent Batteries—the 80th Light A-A Battery and the 1st Air Landing Light A-A Battery. The reconstituted Regiment moved to Aldershot to prepare for overseas service. Mid-April found it at practice camp at Clacton as a preliminary to service in North-West Europe (see Chapter 13).

42nd (The Robin Hood Foresters) S.L. Regiment, R.A.

For the early years of the war The Robin Hoods story is much the same as the 6th Battalion. It was located in Lincolnshire, mostly in the Woodhall Spa and Elsham areas.

The Battalion was more fortunate than most Searchlight Regiments in seeing service towards the end of the war in an overseas theatre of operations. In mid-September 1944 it joined the XXI Army Group in North-West Europe and remained with it until the end of hostilities (see Chapter 13).

8th Battalion

After its return from Norway in May 1940 (see Chapter 5) the 8th Foresters were stationed in Roxburghshire and Renfrewshire in Scotland. There the 148th Brigade was reconstituted as an Independent Brigade Group.

Early in July 1940 the Brigade went to Northern Ireland—the 8th Foresters to Enniskillen in County Fermanagh. The Battalion remained in Northern Ireland until the end of April 1942, when it moved to Lichfield in Staffordshire. In June it moved again—to Kent, at first to Ramsgate, but very soon afterwards to Wrotham Camp, near Sevenoaks. There it remained for the rest of the war as part of the 148th Training Brigade (later designated '148th Pre-O.C.T.U. Training Establishment'). Its rôle was the very important one of training, and selecting, potential officers before they joined an Officer Cadet Training Unit (O.C.T.U.) prior to being commissioned.

9th Battalion (112 Regiment Royal Armoured Corps)

The adventures of the 9th Battalion in the Dunkirk campaign have been told in Chapter 4. On its return early in June 1940 it reformed at Manchester. After a move to Scotland it became a lorried infantry battalion in the 1st Armoured Division and moved to Dorking in the South of England in early January 1941. It was a bitter blow when the Battalion did not accompany the Division on its departure for North Africa in the following August.

In November 1941 the 9th Foresters became an Armoured Car Regiment with the title '112th Regiment Royal Armoured Corps' in the 42nd Armoured Division. In March 1943 it left the 42nd Armoured Division and became the Armoured Car Regiment of the XII Corps. To its great disappointment, the Regiment was replaced in this rôle, in February 1944, by the Royals, owing to that Regiment's greater battle experience, and did not take part in the liberation of Western Europe. Instead its officers and men were employed in various duties connected with the Marshalling Camps at the Embarkation Ports. After the Normandy invasion its personnel were drafted to other units and in October 1944 it was disbanded. The 9th Sherwood Foresters had a disappointing career. After its fine record at Dunkirk it deserved a better fate.

10th (30th) Battalion

The 10th Foresters was formed in November 1939 from No. 45 Group National Defence Companies. In November 1941 it was re-designated '30th Battalion' and was disbanded in December 1942.

Throughout its life it remained in the Nottingham area in a Home Defence rôle; but also supplied drafts to other Forester Battalions and Battalions of other Regiments.

12th Battalion

The 12th Foresters was formed on the 5th July 1940 and, after a period of training, was employed mostly on coast defence duties in East Anglia.

In October 1942 the Battalion embarked at Liverpool on the *Capetown Castle* for India. Travelling via the Cape it disembarked at Bombay on the 25th November and moved to Delhi, where it was employed on Internal Security duties.

In November 1943 the 12th Foresters moved to Delwari Camp, Bhopal State, where it went through intensive jungle training, prior to becoming a jungle-training battalion. Thereafter it trained reinforcements for British units in Burma. By the time of its final disbandment in February 1946 the Battalion had provided reinforcements to nearly every British Infantry Battalion in South-East Asian command.

13th Battalion (163rd Regiment, Royal Armoured Corps)

On the 4th July 1940 the 13th Foresters was formed at Norwich, but a few days later it went to Scotland. In November 1940 it moved to East Anglia where it formed part of the defences during the critical days of the winter of 1940–41, being located at Southend, Epping and Colchester. At first it was in the 207th Infantry Brigade, but was later transferred to the 136th Brigade (45th Division).

In May 1942 the Battalion went to India. Disembarking at Bombay in July it went to Rawalpindi. Almost at once it was converted into an Armoured Regiment with the title '163rd Regiment, Royal Armoured Corps', and became part of the 276th Indian Armoured Brigade Group. In December 1943 it changed back to Infantry and again became the 13th Bn. The Sherwood Foresters.

The Battalion was disbanded in September 1945 whilst still in India.

15th Battalion

The 15th Foresters was originally raised in September 1940 as the 2/10th Battalion, but very shortly after its formation—whilst at Ambergate—its designation was changed and it became the '15th (Home Defence) Battalion'. Its life was a short one and in August 1941 it lost its identity by amalgamation with the 10th Battalion (later to become the 30th Foresters).

50th (14th) Battalion

The 50th Foresters was raised in the early months of the war as a 'Holding Battalion'. Its function was to carry out the more advanced training of men who had completed their primary training at the I.T.C. In the autumn of 1940, however, various changes were made in the rôle and numbering of Infantry Battalions, and in October 1940 the 50th became the 14th Battalion with a Field Force rôle. Following a period of strenuous training in various parts of England the 14th Foresters went to North Africa in the summer of 1942. The story of its exploits in North Africa, various parts of the Middle East and in Italy is told in Chapters 8, 10 and 11.

70th (16th) (1st) Battalion

Formed at Nottingham in September 1940 the 70th Foresters remained there until June 1941, when it moved to Haxley near Doncaster. In August 1942 it went to Brigg in Lincolnshire and very soon after its arrival was re-designated '16th Battalion'. This was followed by moves to Kessingland in Suffolk and Great Yarmouth.

It will be remembered that in June 1942 the 1st Foresters had participated in the general surrender of the Tobruk garrison. The Battalion had not been immediately resuscitated, but a few months later it was decided to convert the 16th Battalion into the 1st Battalion, and this was done in January 1943.

The new 1st Battalion served in the United Kingdom for the rest of the war. When hostilities ended on the 7th May 1945 it was at Maresfield under the command of Lieut-Colonel F. E. A. MacDonnell.

The Regimental Depot and Infantry Training Centre (I.T.C.)

All regular Infantry officers and soldiers—and many National Servicemen and members of the Territorial Army—have a firm affection for their Regimental Depot. In peace time every regular recruit spends the early part of his service there and most regular officers at some time do a spell of duty at their Depot. The Territorial Battalions are located near it and it is a meeting place for members and ex-members of the Regiment of all ranks—regular and non-regular.

In the war years Normanton Barracks, Derby, the 'home' of the Sherwood Foresters, was the one static unit of the Regiment. It would be an exaggeration to describe its buildings as architectural gems; but—built as they were before the days of Nissen huts and prefabrication—they have an atmosphere of solidarity in keeping with the traditions of the Foresters.

The Foresters Depot mobilized on the 1st September 1939 and, in accordance with the mobilization scheme, at once expanded and became The Sherwood Foresters Infantry Training Centre (I.T.C.). The Commanding Officer on mobilization was Major E. E. Sullivan-Tailyour; but in its war-time guise it became a Lieut-Colonel's responsibility and on the 5th September Lieut-Colonel A. A. Fenn arrived and assumed command.

Its rôle was to provide the Field Force Battalions of the Regiment with trained Officer and Other Rank reinforcements. It continued to function in this way until August 1941, when a new system for the primary training of Infantry soldiers came into force. Under this scheme practically the whole Depot went to Lincoln, where it became part of No. 7 Infantry Training Centre, whose task was the primary training of men for the Foresters, Lincolns and York and Lancaster Regiment.

A small Depot Party, under Major J. D'A. Whicher, remained at Normanton Barracks. Its duties were purely administrative, being concerned with the care of Regimental property, the maintenance of certain Regimental records, the administration of Regimental funds and various other tasks of a domestic nature.

With minor modifications this organization continued until the end of the war.

CHAPTER 13

VICTORY IN THE WEST

August 1944 to May 1945

We have seen in previous chapters how three field force Battalions of the Foresters—the 2nd, 5th and 14th—played a worthy part in the campaigns in North Africa and Italy. By mid-February 1945, however, these three Battalions were no longer in Italy. The 14th had been disbanded in January 1945; the 5th had gone to Greece in December 1944 and the 2nd to Palestine in February 1945.

After the first few weeks of 1945 the only Forester units to be located in a theatre where British troops were fighting Germans were the 6th Battalion* and The Robin Hoods† in North-West Europe—both in an Anti-Aircraft rôle, although the former were employed partly as Infantry for a time.

It was unfortunate that the Foresters, whose Battalions had fought so hard in the Mediterranean Theatre, were not in at the kill in Italy. They did, however, play an important rôle in the 'trouble areas' of the Middle East, and in Greece, during the final phase of the war.

Note:

The rest of this chapter rounds off the war careers of the four remaining Field Force Battalions of the Foresters in the closing months of the war, namely:

2nd Battalion in Egypt, Palestine and Syria.
5th Battalion in Greece.
6th Battalion and The Robin Hoods in XXIst Army Group in North-West Europe.

(The narrative of the 2nd and 5th is a continuation from Chapter 11: that of the 6th Battalion and the Robin Hoods from Chapter 12.)

6th Battalion

After a number of false starts the 6th Foresters, under Lieut-Colonel J. P. Widgery, arrived in France during August 1944, the move of Batteries being spread over most of the month.

Between the 27th August and the 16th September the Regiment advanced rapidly across France, deploying *en route* in an Anti-Aircraft rôle in defence of various defiles, road junctions and other likely air targets. No enemy aircraft were seen.

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* 149th Regiment R.A., T.A. (The Sherwood Foresters).

† 42nd (The Robin Hood Foresters) S.L. Regiment, R.A.

By the 17th September the First Canadian Army had advanced up the Channel coast and was investing the German garrisons at Boulogne, Calais and Dunkirk. It was decided to by-pass Dunkirk and a force consisting of the 4th Royal Marine Commando Brigade, with the 107th A-A Brigade (to which the 6th Foresters belonged) in support, was left to contain the enemy in that port. The Dunkirk perimeter was 27 miles long, the Regiment's task being to hold a portion of this and also to give close support with its 40-mm. guns in a ground rôle.

On the 3rd October 502nd Battery left Dunkirk and moved to the Nijmegen area in support of the 101st U.S. Airborne Division. It remained there for seven weeks and then moved to Grave where it was responsible for the defence of a bridge over the River Maas. During its stay there the Regiment claimed three German aircraft (Me 109s).

On the 7th March 1945 Regimental Headquarters and 80th Battery joined 502nd Battery at Grave—the latter Battery reverting to Regimental control.

The Regiment took part in the operation of crossing the Rhine at the end of March, being responsible for the air defence of an important bridge constructed over the river at Emmerich.

By the middle of April the German Air Force had been practically destroyed and the Regiment was relieved of all anti-aircraft commitments. Until the 27th April it was employed North of the Rhine in defending a number of small bridges against sabotage.

On the 27th April the whole Regiment concentrated in the Meppen area. On the 2nd May the 80th Battery moved to Leer, which had just been cleared of enemy, and took over garrison duties. The remainder of the Regiment moved to Leer on the 5th May—the day on which the Germans in North-West Europe surrendered.

The Robin Hoods

The Robin Hoods, under Lieut-Colonel C. W. Cronin, disembarked at Arromanches—where the 'Mulberry' harbour,* constructed by the British, was located—on the 18th September 1944. By this time the Anglo-American Armies had swept Eastwards and were in occupation of most of France, a substantial area of Belgium and part of Holland.

By the 25th September the Regiment was deployed in a Searchlight rôle with Headquarters and 367 S.L. Battery at Brussels, 366 S.L. Battery at Dieppe and 368 S.L. Battery at Ostend.

From then until the end of hostilities changes of location were frequent. By the 15th October Headquarters and 367 S.L. Battery were at Antwerp, 366 S.L. Battery at Tournemond, 368 S.L. Battery remaining at Ostend.

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* The 'Mulberry' harbour was constructed of concrete in sections, which were made in England and towed to Arromanches soon after D Day. It acted as a breakwater against rough weather and as a jetty for embarking ships.

Another move was made on the 4th November—except for 368 S.L. Battery which remained at Ostend. Headquarters went to Oostmalle, 366 S.L. Battery to Herenthalls and 367 S.L. Battery to Gestel. These locations were maintained until mid-April, except in the case of 368 S.L. Battery which moved from Ostend to Baarle-Nassau on the 29th January 1945.

At this stage of the war there was little activity on the part of the German Air Force, which had virtually been driven from the sky. Daylight raids were usually of the 'tip and run' variety, any action by more than one or two aircraft being confined to night raids against easily distinguishable targets—such as cities, large towns and important bridges. An exception to this was during the German's Ardennes offensive in December 1944 and January 1945, when the 'Luftwaffe' made its last effort. It was during these operations—on the nights of the 30/31st December 1944 and 31st December 1944/1st January 1945 that some 20 to 30 enemy 'planes came over 366 and 367 S.L. Batteries at Herenthalls and Gestel respectively.

On the 23rd March 1945 the Allies crossed the Rhine and by mid-April were sweeping through the heart of Germany. By then German air activity was practically non-existent and there was little need for anti-aircraft defence on any but the smallest scale. Some time after this, however, a new rôle had been found for searchlight units—the production of what was called 'artificial moonlight'. In non-technical language this consisted of directing the beams from the lights on to cloud formations at an angle which caused the maximum reflection. The lower the clouds the better the results, as a general rule. The effect was to give good visibility over a considerable area. Occasionally it was used tactically, but more often to assist road movement, bridging operations, road repairs and similar activities in the forward areas, where the normal methods of lighting were not available or were undesirable for tactical reasons.

After the Rhine crossing The Robin Hoods were deployed mostly on, or in the vicinity of, the river—mainly in connection with the production of artificial moonlight. Headquarters was at Jockern, 366 S.L. Battery at Sas-Van-Ghent, 367 S.L. Battery at Rees and 368 S.L. Battery at Xanten. These positions were maintained until hostilities ended on the 7th May, except that 366 S.L. Battery moved from Sas-Van-Ghent to Huist shortly before the German surrender.

Anti-aircraft defence was a very important part of the British war effort, and one which absorbed a large number of men. Nevertheless, in a war of nearly six years' duration it was a monotonous task. Anti-aircraft units lacked the glamour of other fighting arms whose men engaged in closer combat and generally played a more spectacular rôle. Moreover, it required a very high standard of discipline to remain alert, literally for years, in a semi-static rôle, looking for an enemy who sometimes kept away for periods of weeks and months. The Robin Hoods were luckier than many Anti-aircraft units in spending the last eight months of the war as a field unit with XXIst Army Group in North-West Europe.

5th Battalion—Greece

The 5th Foresters' departure from Italy for Greece has been mentioned in Chapter 11. The circumstances were not unfamiliar in the Balkans, and were indeed of a kind which are liable to occur in any country after invasion and a long period of enemy occupation.

Early in October 1944 British airborne forces landed in Greece. About the same time Greek partisans cleared Athens of the enemy and by the first week in November all German forces in the country had been liquidated or had withdrawn. Now new troubles began. The Greeks—who had fought so bravely and unitedly against the Italians in 1940–41, and whose partisans had harassed the occupying Germans so effectively for three-and-a-half years—fell to fighting among themselves. Almost at once the EDES, or right-wing party, which supported the Provisional Government under a Regent—Archbishop Damaskinos—found itself opposed by the Communist inspired ELAS who attempted to occupy Athens and overthrow the government.

The British Government considered it essential to sustain the Archbishop's Provisional Government and prevent the country falling into the hands of the Communists. Consequently, in December 1944 considerable reinforcements of British troops were sent to Greece, some from the Middle East and some from Italy. Among the latter was the 5th Foresters.

The bulk of the personnel and light equipment of the Battalion moved by air and landed at Sedes airfield, near Salonika, on the 2nd and 3rd of December 1944. The vehicles followed later by sea.

The duties at Salonika were very similar to the kind of Internal Security duties with which British troops have long been familiar in many lands. A number of 'vital points' had to be guarded and the troops were at one hour's notice to move.

Between the 6th and 9th December there was a general strike in the port—for what purpose nobody seemed to know, but it soon fizzled out. The situation was complicated by the escape of a number of German and Italian prisoners of war, who had been in Greek hands, and who gave themselves up to the British in considerable numbers. On the 6th it was reported that ELAS supporters were preparing to give trouble by attacking British guards on 'vital points'. Guards were doubled, and other precautions taken, but no serious trouble materialized.

Arrangements in the Battalion for the usual Christmas and New Year festivities were abandoned owing to the uncertainty of the situation, but a Battalion Church Parade was held on Christmas Day.

Minor incidents occurred daily, but none of particular importance. Perhaps the one which gave most anxiety happened on the 5th January 1945, when the Foresters' Greek interpreter, Jean Veletsos, was arrested by ELAS partisans and accused of being a traitor—mainly because he was wearing a British battle-dress. Eventually he was released.

Between the 9th and 14th March the Foresters went by sea from Salonika to Piraeus, the port of Athens. From there they moved to the nearby Voula area.

By this time conditions had greatly improved, although they were by no means entirely tranquil. Athens, and the other centres of population, were however, fairly quiet, and the Greek Army which had been reformed from elements which supported the Provisional Government, was, with British help, becoming increasingly efficient and able to take a hand in the preservation of law and order. It was decided that some British troops could now be withdrawn from Greece.

Italy

On the 15th April 1945 the 5th Foresters embarked at Piraeus on the *Eastern Prince* and on the 17th docked at Taranto in Italy. Disembarkation took place at once and the Battalion moved to Camp C just outside the port.

By this time the German forces in Italy—as in North-West Europe—were crumbling, and it was clear to all that the end was near.

Between the 30th April and 2nd May the Battalion moved North to Bertinora.

On the 28th April Mussolini was assassinated, by his own countrymen. On the 2nd May reports of Hitler's death were received, and on the same day the German forces in Northern Italy, Tyrol, Styria and Carinthia surrendered unconditionally to Field-Marshal Sir Harold Alexander.

On the 8th May the 5th Foresters celebrated 'Victory in Europe' (V.E.) Day at Bertinora. Soon they were to be on the move again (see Chapter14).

2nd Battalion

On the 22nd February 1945 the *Indrapoora*, with the 2nd Foresters on board, docked at Haifa in Palestine. Immediately on disembarkation they entrained and moved down to El Majdal, in Southern Palestine. On the 23rd they took over a camp at Julis from the 1st King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry. This camp was pitched on the hump of a low ridge. Gaza lay 20 miles to the South, Jerusalem 40 to the North-East and Tel-Aviv about 35 miles North. At that time this part of the 'Promised Land' seemed barren and unattractive. The first three weeks at Julis were devoted to organized leave in Egypt—at Cairo and Alxandria—a proportion of each Company being sent at a time.

In March the Battalion received considerable numbers of ex-Artillerymen as reinforcements. This enabled B Company—which had been reduced to cadre strength in Italy owing to heavy casualties—to be resuscitated under Captain P. N. Davis, who had recently returned from hospital after being wounded at Monte Grande.

April was spent in training. Early in May the news was received that Sergeants G. Barrick and N. Cupitt had been awarded Military Medals for gallantry in Italy.

Victory in Europe was celebrated, in a variety of ways, on the 8th and 9th May. The highlight was a Battalion race meeting at which all the racing was done by camels, mules and donkeys, and the bets made on an improvised 'Tote'.

1st, 2nd, 5th, 6th, The Robin Hoods,
8th, 12th and 13th Battalions.

CHAPTER 14

AFTERMATH OF WAR

May 1945 to July 1946

The war in Europe ended on the 7th May 1945 and a little more than three months later, on the 14th August, Japan surrendered unconditionally. Our enemies, who had seemed so formidable three years before, were now in ruins—their armed forces destroyed, their countries laid waste by bombing and their dead numbered in millions. The Allies were undisputed masters of the world—a world which looked forward to an era of peace and goodwill.

Unfortunately this was not to be. A gallant Ally of the war years was to become a 'cold war' enemy and a threat to all the free world. The story of the post-war years is almost entirely one of political conflict with, and military preparations against, Russia in Europe; and of tension and Communist inspired guerrilla warfare in other parts of the world.

As no unit of the Sherwood Foresters took an active part in the war against Japan, the end of the war, as far as the Foresters are concerned, has been taken as the time of Germany's surrender and the short narratives in this chapter begin in early May 1945.

As described in earlier chapters some Battalions of the Regiment were disbanded, amalgamated with others or had their designation changed, before the war ended.

When the Allies accepted the surrender of Germany on the 7th May 1945 the situation of the eight surviving Forester Battalions was as follows:

1st Battalion (Lieut-Colonel F. E. A. MacDonnell . . .	United Kingdom
2nd Battalion (Lieut-Colonel J. K. Windeatt)	Palestine
5th Battalion (Lieut-Colonel R. J. Welchman)	Italy
6th Battalion (149th Light A.A. Regiment, R.A.) (Lieut-Colonel J. P. Widgery)	Germany
The Robin Hoods (42nd S.L. Regiment, R.A.) (Lieut-Colonel C. W. Cronin)	Germany
8th Battalion (148th Pre-O.C.T.U. Training Establishment) (Lieut-Colonel G. R. G. Bird)	United Kingdom
12th Battalion (Lieut-Colonel R. P. Scott)	India
13th Battalion (163rd Regiment Royal Armoured Corps) (Lieut-Colonel A. L. Gill)	India

As soon as the war ended the British people—following the example of 1918—demanded drastic reductions in the Armed Forces. The release of men in the

Services was governed by a priority system based primarily on age and length of service; but which also gave favourable treatment to certain categories of key men in industry. Under this system men were put into numbered groups (known as age/service groups) and were returned to civil life as their groups became eligible for release. The system worked well; but, as can be imagined, it had a most disruptive effect on units and caused Commanding Officers much concern. It is important to remember that throughout most of the time covered by this chapter there was in every unit a constant flow of Officers and men to civil life—a flow in which the older men with the longest service (in other words the most experienced leaders) came first. These were replaced by men in lower release groups, from units being disbanded and a few newly enrolled men. In those days an Infantry Battalion had a constantly changing population in which there could be no satisfactory organization or system of training. The only permanent members—and even they did not exist in all units—were a small body of regular officers and long-service N.C.O.s.

1st Battalion

Early May 1945 found the 1st Foresters at Maresfield, where they remained until mid-June and then moved to Charlton Park, near Canterbury. On 23rd June Lieut-Colonel F. E. A. MacDonnell vacated command in favour of Lieut-Colonel G. R. G. Bird.

The Battalion remained in camp at Charlton Park throughout July, August and September. There certain preliminary steps were taken for a move to the Far East, where many people thought the war against Japan might go on for a long time. However, when in mid-August the Japanese surrendered, these preparations were discontinued and during the first week in October the 1st Foresters moved, by march route, to Citadel Barracks, Dover. This was a preliminary to proceeding to Germany and embarkation leave started at once.

On the 18th November 1945 the Battalion embarked on the *Lady of Mann* and arrived at Ostend on the following day. On the 20th they arrived at Eslohe and became part of the British Army of the Rhine (B.A.O.R.). By Christmas, however, the Battalion was scattered over an area in Sanderland, the size of Kent, under conditions in which—under the direction of the Military Government Organization—each Company ruled a small area where the Company Commander was military commander, judge and jury.

In March 1946 the 1st Foresters moved to Recklinghausen in the Northern Ruhr, to guard No. 4 Civil Internment Camp. The camp contained many dangerous men and although many attempts were made, and plans revealed, there were no escapes while the Foresters were there.

The Battalion had been part of the 147th Infantry Brigade of the 49th Division. With the disbandment of this Division in the early summer of 1946 the Foresters moved to Delmenhaust, near Bremen and became part of the 131st Lorried Infantry Brigade of the 7th Armoured Division (the famous 'Desert Rats'). Here they were in close contact with American units and enjoyed a variety of sports and recreation. Delmenhaust was voted an excellent station.

2nd Battalion

The 2nd Sherwood Foresters were in Palestine, at Julis, when the war in Europe ended, but it soon became clear that trouble in the Middle East was likely for some time to come. In Palestine itself incidents between Jews and Arabs were of daily occurrence and in Syria and the Lebanon there were frequent clashes between French and Arabs. These incidents culminated in the French shelling and bombing Damascus.

This resulted in the 2nd Foresters being placed at six hours' notice to move and on the 31st May, with Union Jacks painted on all vehicles, they crossed into Syria. On the 2nd June the Battalion marched into Damascus to undertake a very tricky job.

Battalion Headquarters and one Company was located on the Racecourse, two Companies were in the town and one Company guarding the airfield to the South. All barracks and other buildings occupied by the French were piqueted and French and French Colonial troops confined to barracks. As a result of the bombing and shelling of the City, feeling between French and Syrians was very bitter. The main task of the British troops was to keep murder, looting and sniping within reasonable limits.

Together with the 3rd Hussars and Scinde Horse, the Foresters policed the town. When the Battalion handed over to the King's Shropshire Light Infantry on 8th June the town was completely quiet and during their stay there the Foresters had suffered no casualties. They then moved to a training camp at Jebel Mazar, about ten miles outside Damascus.

Meanwhile, trouble had broken out in Latakia, a small port some miles to the North and on the 23rd June A Company, with a Medical Detachment and some machine-guns from the Middlesex Regiment, moved off to deal with the situation.

(The account which follows is an abridged version of that given in 'The Story of the 2nd Battalion. The Sherwood Foresters 1939–1945,' by Captain J. W. A. Masters—written soon after the event.)

A Company and the attached troops (all under command of Major S. L. A. Carter) arrived in Latakia on the morning of the 24th June and received a big ovation from the Syrians on their entry. Some forty Royal Marines from the *Arethusa*, laying of Beirut, were guarding the dock area, and A Company took over from them under perfectly quiet conditions. One platoon was also placed in the centre of the town and one in a monastery two miles out. Detachment H.Q. remained with the dockside platoon.

Things were very quiet for the ensuing few days, and on the 30th June the Monastery Platoon was shifted on to Qualaa Hill, a feature which dominated the town and which was occupied by French troops. The Commanding Officer visited the detachment on the same day. Meanwhile, the remainder of the Battalion was moving North and eventually arrived at Insariye, an hour's run South of Beirut, on 5th July. On the same day H.M.S. *Musketeer*, a destroyer which had been lying off Latakia in support of the Foresters, left for revictualling at Beirut.

The first serious incident took place on 5th July, disturbing the almost normal atmosphere of the town. It appeared that a French military ambulance knocked a Moslem youth off his bicycle and almost immediately the ambulance was surrounded by angry civilians. The news of a fight quickly spread through the town; shops were closed, and isolated French troops were attacked by Syrian civilians. The French troops immediately retaliated with rifle, rifle-grenade and 81-mm. mortar fire from their barracks and from the roof of the French Town Major's office. A machine-gun also opened up from the French positions on Qualaa Hill. Immediately the Forester detachment stood to and the Detachment Commander, Major S. L. A. Carter, went around the town in an armoured car instructing the French to cease fire. This they did and the situation quietened.

Firstly confining the French troops to their barracks, the detachment commander ordered a curfew, which was rigidly enforced. The night passed reasonably quietly and the situation seemed to have cleared, although there were minor incidents, including the stabbing of venturesome French troops.

A Company strengthened their positions and reinforcements were requested. In the early hours of the next morning the *Musketeer* returned from Beirut and two troops of the King's Dragoon Guards arrived in the town. Later that day the Commanding Officer, Lieut-Colonel J. K. Windeatt, arrived to take command of all British troops in the Latakia area. Hard on his arrival came news of further trouble.

Information was received that a band of well-armed tribesmen was approaching Latakia along the Aleppo road. The colonel of the Syrian Gendarmerie, Colonel Mohamed Ali, was sent out to investigate the situation, escorted by two British armoured cars. The tribesmen, who were about two thousand strong, were all armed: some with British and French service rifles, some with automatics, and others with bombs. They told the Syrian Police Colonel that they had come to drive the French out of Latakia, and that only with a British guarantee that the French would be removed forthwith would they renounce their intention.

They agreed to advance no further during the night whilst a British officer returned to Latakia, some thirty kilometres away, for instructions from Colonel Windeatt. The Colonel received instructions from Higher Command that the tribesmen would be denied entry—by fire, if necessary—into Latakia. Accordingly, B Company who had come up from Tripoli, took up positions on the Aleppo road some twenty-five kilometres from Latakia. This detachment, one hundred strong, with a troop of armoured cars under the direct command of the Commanding Officer, stood ready to stop the two thousand tribesmen if they endeavoured to advance any further.

At 0930 hrs. the Mohafez, the Syrian Governmental chief of Latakia, together with the British political officer, visited the band of tribesmen. He found them extremely well organized—even having their own doctor and first-aid post.

The Mohafez told them that all was well in Latakia and promised to call on them if assistance was needed. Whereupon the tribesmen agreed to pull back to the village of Jisr Chochour, but would not disband. No further trouble, however, was forthcoming from their direction and a very tricky situation was overcome with very few troops at hand.

That day there was considerable looting of French property by the Syrians, but this was eventually brought under control and the following day was quiet, although the shops remained closed.

Meanwhile the Battalion was still moving North, and on 11th July C and D Companies arrived in Tripoli from Insariye. On the same day news of trouble came from the South. It appeared that in the small town of Tartous, some sixty miles down the coast from Latakia, the French garrison troops, fearing action by the Arabs, had occupied some houses which gave good tactical cover to their barracks. Syrians immediately began to fire on the French, who kept perfect discipline and did not fire a shot. That afternoon two armoured cars, under the command of Major Carter, were dispatched to Tartous. The *Musketeer* arrived off Tartous soon afterwards and the situation became quiet.

On the following day Battalion H.Q., H.Q. Company and C Company arrived in Latakia. On 13th July H.M.S. *Musketeer* returned to Latakia, followed, two days later, by Major Carter and his party.

Meanwhile, further trouble was reported from Kessab, a village very near the Turkish border north of Latakia. A platoon of C Company under Capt. M. R. Palsay, a fluent speaker of Turkish, was dispatched to the village. They took over the guard on the French barracks and the French frontier officer's house and office, and took steps to prevent further belligerent activities.

Kessab was a village with an Armenian community, and a fair proportion of the Armenians were members of the French 'Troupes Speciales'. This provoked a feeling of tension between the Syrians and the Armenians, and the latter had tried to desert from the French Army. This was resisted by the French. Meanwhile the Arabs were trying to 'beat up' both the French and Armenians. The presence of the Forester platoon brought matters under control and two days after its arrival, the French element of the garrison were evacuated to Latakia.

Meanwhile a regular night patrol of two armoured cars had been laid on between Latakia and Tartous, via the village of Banias. Before the return of the Kessab platoon the French corvette *L'Ajaccienne* arrived off Latakia, and left next day with a cargo of French household belongings.

On 20th July the Syrian Army held a march-past in Latakia, which passed without incident, and in the quieter days that followed further evacuation of French troops and families proceeded in an orderly manner.

With considerable regret the Battalion said goodbye to its comrades of the *Musketeer* when that vessel was relieved by the destroyer *Jervis* on 29th July. A refreshing and most pleasant memory of the Latakia 'campaign', which will live long in the minds of all ranks, was the first-class spirit of comradeship that existed during the whole time between the officers and men of the Foresters and their counterparts of the *Musketeer*.

Only minor incidents remained to be dealt with during the Battalion's last week in Latakia. On 29th July a Syrian officer, arriving to take over the French barracks, was met by a demonstration on the part of the French troops, and while escaping his car was stoned. He escaped on foot. On 31st July nine men were arrested by the Battalion for attempting to remove arms and ammunition from the French barracks.

Meanwhile, the evacuation of all 'Troupes Speciales' and French families was completed, and although during these days the quietness was occasionally disturbed by an odd shot or explosion, things were generally tranquil.

Conditions remained quiet until four days later the Battalion was relieved, its job being completed and the situation being well under control. On 8th August it arrived in a temporary camp at Insariye.

After a week of training the Battalion left for its permanent camp at Beit Lid, in Palestine, where it arrived on 14th August 1945. After a period in Egypt the Battalion returned to Palestine (Haifa) in early 1946. The summer of 1946 found it camped on Mount Carmel. By then the situation in Palestine was deteriorating rapidly.

The Battalion was to remain in Palestine until the end of 1947.

5th Battalion

We left the 5th Battalion on V.E. Day, at Bertinora in Italy (see Chapter 13) having arrived shortly before from the Middle East. With the surrender of German forces in Italy preparations were at once made to move Allied forces into Austria and Yugoslavia, and here a brief explanation of the political situation in Central Europe is necessary.

In Yugoslavia a very highly organized resistance movement had been evolved. The strongest group, under Marshal Tito, clearly aimed at political power, but at that time it was not clear whether or not Tito favoured a Communist regime. Another partisan group under General Mihailovic favoured King Peter; but was bitterly opposed by Tito and his followers, who asserted that it was German and Bulgar inspired. At this time, however, Marshal Tito was the dominant figure and the position was not made easier by his obvious ambition to extend the Yugoslav frontiers at the expense of Austria and Hungary, and to occupy the port of Trieste. Another complication was the danger of Russia overrunning Austria and Yugoslavia and turning them into Communist 'satellite' states, although the danger of this was not, at that time, fully realized.

On top of all these difficulties was the tragic plight of large numbers of 'displaced persons'—people who had been transferred from one part of Europe to another by the Germans for forced labour, and many of whom were unable, owing to fear of political persecution, to return to their homes. This produced the problem of the 'stateless person'. In addition there were many thousands of surrendered ex-enemy soldiers to be disarmed—and bands of partisans ready to kill them when they *were* disarmed. Everywhere there was confusion with men acting on passions, prejudices and self-interest rather than from reason or with justice.

The 10th May 1945 found the 139th Brigade speeding Northwards with the rest of the 46th Division. On the following day the 5th Foresters reached Udine (Italy) near the Austrian border. By the 13th they had reached Judenburg in Austria. There they remained until the 25th May when they moved to Eberstein on the Austrian–Yugoslav frontier.

Their duties consisted of frontier control, mainly to prevent Yugoslav troops crossing into Austria; the general maintenance of law and order; the disarming of German soldiers and the collection and welfare of displaced persons. A task requiring more than usual tact was to persuade parties of Cossacks (horsed) to rejoin the Russian Army in the Russian zone of Austria. In July the Foresters made a short move to Leibhitz (Austria) and the end of 1945 found them in the same place. By then some semblance of stability had been reached, although 'incidents' demanding much tact—combined with firmness—were still quite common.

By March 1946 the Battalion had been reduced to cadre strength. The cadre returned to the United Kingdom to await the reforming of the Territorial Army a year later.

6th and Robin Hoods Battalions

After V.E. Day both Battalions gave up their Anti-Aircraft rôle, and reorganized on an Infantry basis for garrison duty in Germany—the 6th Battalion mainly in Emden and the Robin Hoods in Hamburg.

The two Battalions were reduced to cadre status by February 1946 and March 1946 respectively.

8th Battalion

The 8th Foresters remained in the United Kingdom after the Armistice and was reduced to cadre status by September 1946.

12th and 13th Battalions

These two Battalions were disbanded in India in February 1946 and September 1945 respectively.

1st, 2nd, 5th, 6th, The Robin Hoods
and 8th Battalions and the Regimental
Depot.

CHAPTER 15

THE COLD WAR

August 1946 to July 1957

By the late summer of 1946 the four Territorial Battalions of the Foresters who were fortunate enough to enjoy a permanent existence, had been run-down to cadre strength and had returned to the United Kingdom. The 12th and 13th Battalions had been disbanded in India. Of the array of more than a dozen Forester Battalions which had existed in the peak years of the war, only the two regular Battalions remained in an active state—the 1st Battalion near Bremen in Germany and the 2nd Battalion in Palestine.

The surviving prisoners of war had returned. Many, especially those who had been in Japanese hands, were crippled for life: others were in bad health.

Although during the latter years of the war Russia had been an indispensable ally, she had also been a very difficult one. Early in the peace negotiations it became clear that she had not relaxed her missionary tactics—typified by the slogan 'World Communism by any Means'. In the last weeks of the war Soviet troops had occupied most of Eastern Europe and part of Germany. The 'iron curtain' descended on Europe: by mid-summer, 1946, a bitter struggle—to be known as the 'cold war'—was being waged between Russia and her satellites on the one hand and the Free World on the other. Russia's method of waging 'cold warfare' has been aptly described as 'The policy of making mischief by all methods short of war—that is to say, short of war involving the Soviet Union in open hostilities'. Largely as a result of Russian policy, Britain was to be engaged in warlike operations in Korea, Malay, Palestine, Kenya, Egypt and other places; was forced to maintain large garrisons in Europe and further afield, and undertake numerous protective measures such as the Berlin air-lift.

Until world conditions had become clarified it was difficult to judge the size and pattern of the British Army of the future; but it soon became clear that it was likely to be much larger than we could hope to raise by our traditional voluntary system. It was, therefore, decided to continue conscription—under the guise of 'National Service'. Young men, beginning in their late teens, were to do two years' full-time service with the Regular Army and three-and-a-half years' part-time service with the Territorial Army or Supplementary Reserve (later to become the Emergency Reserve).

The Territorial Army was to be composed of Territorial Volunteers, and National Servicemen who were on part-time service. Volunteers, who in the main were to provide the leaders, were to consist of directly enrolled Volunteers and National Servicemen who undertook additional commitments and responsibilities by 'volunteering'. It was clear that although the effect on the Regular Army would be immediate it would be two years before any National Servicemen would join the Territorial Army—i.e. after the first to be enrolled had completed their two years' full-time service.

THE REGULAR BATTALIONS

1st Battalion

In Germany the winter of 1946–47 was a very severe one and was accompanied by a fuel shortage.

In the early spring of 1947 the 1st Foresters moved to Hamburg where they took over from the 1st Irish Guards. One Company was on detachment at Putlos on the Baltic Coast—the Rifle Companies taking this duty in turn.

The autumn of 1948 found the Battalion at Goslar in the Harz Mountains, only about two miles from the Russian Zone. Here the barracks were good and it was a pleasant and healthy place, although very cold in winter. There were excellent opportunities for sport, including skiing and boar hunting.

The soldier's life in Germany at that time had many attractions. The quarters were good, most barracks—including that at Goslar—being modern and designed for Goering's Air Force, which had always been given the best of everything. In addition, there was a special rate of exchange for the occupying troops which increased the purchasing power of the mark, and special facilities were given in connection with purchases at the N.A.A.F.I. By the winter of 1948/49 drafts of National Servicemen were joining the Battalion at the rate of about 28 men per month.

During the summer and autumn of 1949 the Battalion was in a training camp at Soltau on Luneburger Heath—the old training ground of the German Army. Many big exercises took place—'Agility I', 'Agility II' and others—involving movement all over Western Germany.

The Foresters remained at Goslar during 1950 and 1951, but spent most of both summers at Soltau Training Camp. In September 1951 the Battalion participated in 'Exercise Counterthrust', in which some 150,000 Belgian, British, Danish, Dutch, French, Norwegian and United States troops took part.

2nd Battalion

The 2nd Foresters spent Christmas 1946 in Palestine under the shadow of Mount Carmel—following two weeks in a musketry camp.

Early in the new year the Battalion moved, as part of the 3rd Infantry Brigade, to Camp 22, midway between Tel Aviv and Haifa, and three miles from the Jewish town of Nathanya. From the point of law and order, the situation in the country was still very bad and the Battalion was overburdened by guard and patrol duties. In view of the deteriorating situation it was decided in February 1947 to evacuate all families to the United Kingdom—'Operation Polly' as it was called.

The next event of note was 'Operation Elephant' which took place in March, when the 1st Division put a 45-mile cordon round Tel Aviv. This involved eighteen days and nights of patrolling and life under field conditions. Owing to the distances between posts much night patrolling had to be done.

In April a sad separation took place when the 2nd Foresters left Camp 22 and the 3rd Brigade and 1st Division—with whom they had served without a break for nine years.

By the 1st May they were at Mount Scopus near Jerusalem. This was a very active place, with alarms occurring almost daily. The next move was to Sarafand Cantonment, where the amenities were fairly good and comparative peace reigned. It was here that the Battalion received the gloomy news that it was to be reduced to a cadre strength of 200 as a preliminary to being placed in 'suspended animation'.

By 1947 decisions had been made regarding the size and shape of the Army. These involved drastic reductions in the Infantry and nearly all Regiments were reduced to one regular battalion.

Drafts were sent to the 2nd Royal Warwickshire Regiment and the 2nd Royal Lincolnshire Regiment. During the last week in September the cadre moved to Ismalia in Egypt and in October embarked at Port Said for England. The party disembarked at Liverpool on the 8th November and the same evening was pulled into Derby railway station by the L.M.S.* engine 'The Sherwood Forester'. There they were met by the Colonel of the Regiment, many serving officers and friends, their own band and the Regimental ram 'Derby XVII'.

On Sunday the 10th November the Battalion was given a civic reception in Derby and marched through the City with 'bayonets fixed, band playing, drums beating and Colours flying'. Later that day a Thanksgiving Service was held in the Cathedral.

From the beginning of 1948 the strength of the Battalion dwindled rapidly, several drafts being sent to the 1st Battalion. On the 5th August a cadre of 2 Officers, 1 Warrant Officer, 4 N.C.O.s and 5 men left to join the 1st Battalion in Germany, taking with them the Colours and 'Derby XVII'. From then the 95th temporarily ceased to exist as a separate unit.

1st and 2nd Battalions

The 1st Foresters left Goslar in June 1952—with deep regret after three-and-a-half years at this pleasant station. They handed over to the 1st Bn. The Royal Lincolnshire Regiment.

Meanwhile, early in 1952, it had been decided to resuscitate the 2nd Battalions of a few Regiments. Among them was the 95th, mainly because of the Foresters' good recruiting record.

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* London, Midland and Scottish—one of the private railway Companies before the railways were nationalized.

At 9 a.m. on 3rd April 1952 Lieut-Colonel R. T. Foster and eight other Foresters assembled in front of the Guard Room at Meeanee Barracks, Colchester. They were the cadre round which the new 95th was to be formed.

On the 8th May the first large draft of National Servicemen arrived from Derby. Others followed and by the end of September 1952 Headquarter, Support and three Rifle Companies had been formed and the Battalion was in good shape.

We will now look back to the 29th June 1952. On that day the 1st Battalion arrived at Colchester and was met by the resuscitated 95th with their Drums.

On the 8th August the two Battalions were on parade, together with representative parties from the Territorial Battalions and the Old Comrades. The Colonel of the Regiment inspected the parade.

On the 12th August the 1st Battalion boarded the *Empire Ken* at Southampton, en route for Egypt.

1st Battalion (continued)

The 1st Foresters disembarked at Port Said on the 23rd August 1952 and moved at once by bus to Tel-El-Kebir. There they manned searchlight towers and guarded a 17-mile perimeter against raiders in search of loot.

In January 1953 they left for Derna in North Africa to become part of the 25th Armoured Brigade. The journey from Port Said to Tobruk was carried out by sea on H.M.T. *Devonshire*, and thence by road to Derna. Tobruk was a place of unhappy memory for the 45th, for it was here, in June 1942, that they had been overwhelmed and captured by Rommel's men. The Battalion had spent one night in 1942 at Derna as prisoners.

Derna proved to be a good station for training. During the summer of 1953 an extensive tour of the nearby 1942 battlefields was made, which proved of great interest to all who took part.

1954 found the 45th still in Derna. On 1st May the Battalion provided two Companies, each of 100 men, and the Band and Colours, for the inspection of Her Majesty the Queen and The Duke of Edinburgh on the occasion of their visit to Tobruk.

On the 11th April 1955 the 1st Foresters embarked at Tobruk on the *Empire Ken* for the United Kingdom. Their stay at home was to be a short one, before going to Germany.

2nd Battalion (continued)

In October 1952 the 95th left Colchester for Germany, where it was stationed at Wuppertal as part of the 6th Infantry Brigade of the 2nd Division. The Battalion took with it 'Derby XVIII'—the successor to 'Derby XVII' who had died whilst with the 1st Battalion in Germany. 'Derby XVIII' came from Chatsworth Park and was a gift from the Duke of Devonshire. He was, therefore, related—perhaps only remotely—to his predecessor who also came from Chatsworth Park.

In October 1953 the 95th moved to Celle to become a unit of the 7th Armoured Brigade in the 7th Armoured Division ('The Desert Rats').

Unfortunately the optimism with which the 2nd Foresters had been resuscitated in 1952 did not last very long. Towards the end of 1954 there were rumours of another 'axe' and this proved to be so. On the 14th May 1955 the Battalion staged its farewell parade in B.A.O.R. by Beating Retreat on the main square at Trenchard Barracks, Celle. A great number of spectators—American, Belgian, German and British—attended, including the British Ambassador, Sir Frederick Hoyer-Miller; Lieut-General Sir Hugh Stockwell (Corps Commander); Major-General K. C. Cooper (Divisional Commander); Major-General C. B. Fairbanks and the Oberburgomeister of Celle.

On 12th June the Battalion left Celle Railway Station. Many old friends saw them off, and as the train moved out the band of the Royals played 'Auld Lang Syne' and 'I'm 95'. On arrival in England the Battalion went to Lichfield.

1st and 2nd Battalions (continued)

We now come to one of the greatest events, although a sad one, in the story of the Regiment—the amalgamation of the 1st and 2nd Foresters—the 45th and 95th. The amalgamation parade was held at Normanton Barracks, Derby on Sunday 3rd July 1955 and, fittingly, was arranged for the same day as the annual Pilgrimage to Crich, which took place after the parade. (The account which follows is a slightly abridged version of the one which appeared in the Regimental Magazine—*The Forester.*)

Well over a thousand spectators had taken their seats on the barrack square by 10.30 a.m. on Sunday, 3rd July, when the parade formed up in heavy rain—rain which fell uninterruptedly for five hours.

But the parade went on faultlessly, watched by many Foresters with their families and friends, by the Lord-Lieutenant of Derbyshire and a body of civic dignitaries of the two counties. After it was over, the Officers' and Sergeants' Messes and the special canteen were crowded with wet, but cheerful, folk taking what there was in the way of food and drink, and unanimous in praise for those who had planned and carried out so impressive a ceremony.

This ceremony was in three parts. Drawn up in line facing the piled drums were three guards: Number 1 Guard with the Colours of the 1st Battalion on the right; Number 3 Guard with the Colours of the 2nd Battalion on the left, and between them a double guard made up of men of both Battalions.

After inspecting the Line, the Colonel of the Regiment waited whilst the Parade Commander, Lieut-Colonel J. H. M. Hackett, D.S.O., O.B.E., the outgoing Commanding Officer of the 2nd Battalion, formed his flank guards inwards to form a hollow square, and then the General ordered the Colours to take post.

In slow time the Colour Parties of both Battalions marched towards each other and joined in line behind the Parade Commander and 'Derby XVIII'.

The first part of the ceremony, the symbolic amalgamation of the two regular Battalions, was now complete and the clergy moved to the piled drums to begin the parade service.

The combined Bands accompanied the hymns. The Lesson was read by the Free Church Chaplain, and the Prayers said by the Anglican Padre. After giving a short address, Bishop George Sinker, Assistant Bishop of Derby, pronounced the Blessing. Head-dresses were replaced and the parade came to attention for the National Anthem.

As the Anthem ended, the Colonel brought the Lord Mayor of Nottingham and the Mayor of Derby before the Bishop who blessed the twin copies of the Regiment's Roll of Honour made for our men of the 1939–1945 War. After handing a copy to each of the civic heads for safe keeping in their cities, General White returned to the Saluting Base. Meanwhile, some 400 'Old Comrades' had silently fallen in in line behind Number 3 Guard under the lead of Brigadier C. E. Hudson, V.C., C.B., D.S.O., M.C. The oldest Forester there was James Newberry who first entered the Depot gate as a recruit seventy years previously. Lieut-Colonel Hackett having handed over the parade to Lieut-Colonel H. Pyman, Commanding Officer of the newly-amalgamated Battalion, retired to the Saluting Base.

The third part of the ceremony opened with the march off of Numbers 1 and 3 Guards. As these representatives of the old 1st and 2nd Battalions left the ground in slow time to the strains of 'Auld Lang Syne', heads amongst the crowd were bared in the rain and Number 2 Guard, as representing the amalgamated Battalion of the Foresters, presented arms. Immediately the flank guards were clear, and Number 2 Guard had received in its midst the joint Colour Party, the parade stepped out to the quick-step 'The Young May Moon', 'Derby XVIII' leading, and marched past their Colonel. Behind them came the Old Comrades for whom the Band played the stirring march 'Old Comrades', and finally the combined Band and Drums went by to close a memorable parade. Spectators dispersed quickly in search of drink, food and shelter from the elements. As they passed the Orderly Room, they admired the Stand of Colours there set up under guard. The 1st and 2nd Battalion sets were augmented here by the Regimental Colours of three of the Territorial Battalions, 5th, 6th and 8th Foresters.

At 2 p.m., with no prospect of clear skies, the Colonel of the Regiment decided reluctantly that the mass move to Crich for the Pilgrimage ceremony should be restricted and the ceremony there curtailed. The fleet of buses waiting to take parties up the hill were sent home, many guests left, and the Band, Drums and Colour Parties dismissed to dry out. So it was a small party only, led by Major-General White, which left Barracks and joined those already assembled at 3.30 p.m. in the Memorial Enclosure at Crich.

Here sunshine after storm and the usual shrewd hill wind greeted the clergy, the reduced civic party of dignitaries, the Old Comrades with their Standards and the General and his party. He at once explained the reasons for shortening the Pilgrimage service which began without the usual hymns. When this was ended, the General spoke to the pilgrims of the shadow cast over the Regiment this year by the disbandment of the 2nd Battalion and said we must close our ranks and carry on. He was glad that the end of Anti-Aircraft Command had not ended the life of the old 6th Foresters who were to become A-A gunners for the 49th Armoured Division, but remain inside the Forester family. In the family, too, remained the Robin Hoods. This old City of Nottingham Battalion who, like the 6th, had fought as A-A gunners in the last war, had been happily amalgamated with the old South Notts. Hussars—now '350th (Robin Hood Foresters) Heavy Regiment, R.A., T.A.'—will keep all honours, titles and privileges they won over the years. The General ended by describing the Regimental Association as the very root of the Regiment.

Last Post ... Silence ... Reveille ... the laying of wreaths at the Tower, and the Colonel's wreath at the Smith-Dorrien Memorial, brought this 34th Pilgrimage to its end. 'There was about it,' wrote an Old Comrade from Chesterfield, 'a wonderful atmosphere of remembrance and dedication, which I have rarely known and which I shall not easily forget.'

1st Battalion (continued)

It now became the task of the 1st Battalion to maintain the reputation and traditions of both the 45th and 95th, and from the day of the amalgamation parade the Battalion notice board appeared in the following form:

1st Battalion The Sherwood Foresters
(Her Majesty's 45th and 95th Foot)

The first three weeks of July 1955, before the 1st Foresters left Chisledon for Germany, was a period of great activity. Embarkation leave, the sorting out of those who were to go from those to stay behind, arrangements for families and many other things inescapable from an overseas move. The change in personnel was considerable and it was a very different Battalion which entrained at Chisledon on the 22nd July to the one which had left Derna little more than three months before. The journey to Germany was via Harwich and The Hook of Holland. On arrival they went to Dempsey Barracks, Sennelager, near Paderborn, Westphalia—in the heart of Germany's famous military training centre.

The Battalion was given a month or so to settle down, and then began a series of big exercises—'Harvest Frolic', 'Red Rag', 'Commonwealth IV', 'Full House 1955' and others—which were typical of life and training with the British Army of the Rhine in the early 1950s.

There is little more to tell and at the time this history closes (July 1957) the 1st Foresters are still at Sennelager.

The Territorial Battalions and the Depot

The Territorial Army was officially reformed on the 1st January 1947. The first few months were spent in selecting and enrolling key personnel, and making administrative arrangements connected with the setting up of the reformed units in their home counties, after long absence, in many cases.

The 5th Battalion became 'active' again in May 1947 under the Command of Lieut-Colonel H. W. King with its various components located as follows:

Bn. H.Q. . . . . }
H.Q. Company . . } Derby
Support Company . }

A Company—Belper
B Company—Ilkeston
C Company—Ripley
D Company—Church Gresley

The Battalion was one of the lorried Infantry Battalions of the 147th Brigade. Among its personnel were a number who had been prisoners of war in Japanese hands.

The 6th Battalion was reformed with the title '575th Light A-A Regiment (The Sherwood Foresters) R.A. (T.A.)', under the command of Lieut-Colonel N. E. Carline. Its Headquarters was in Chesterfield.

The Robin Hoods also retained its Anti-aircraft rôle with the title '577th Searchlight Regiment, R.A. (Robin Hood Foresters) (T.A.)', under its last war-time commander, Lieut-Colonel G. A. Wharton. It was the first unit in the Territorial Army to be given the new dual rôle of defence against low-flying aircraft combined with ground defence against light armour and infantry. Towards the end of 1949, however, its designation was changed to '577th Light A-A./S.L. Regiment R.A. (Robin Hood Foresters) (T.A.)' It was re-armed with 40-mm. Bofors guns, and given a mobile rôle against low-flying attack and against heavy armour in forward areas. Headquarters was at Nottingham.

The 8th Battalion was reformed as a Motor Battalion of the 9th (Independent) Armoured Brigade. Its Commanding Officer was Lieut-Colonel H. P. L. Glass, who had commanded before the Battalion was reduced to cadre form in September 1946. It was located as follows.

Bn. H.Q. . . } Newark
H.Q. Company . }
A Company . . Nottingham

B Company—Sutton-in-Ashfield
C Company—Worksop and Retford
D Company—Newark and Southwell

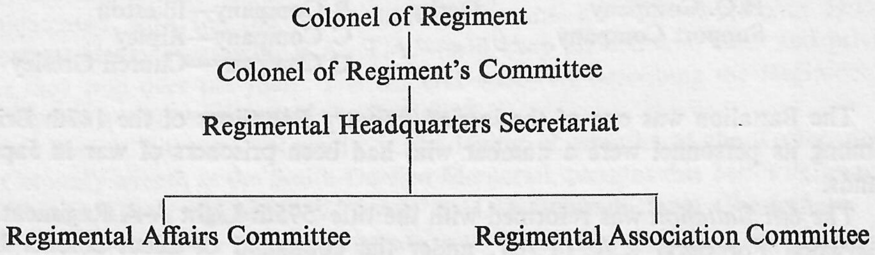
In pre-war years 'camp' was the great annual event in all Territorial units, and it was the same in the post-war era.

We will now turn to Regimental Headquarters at Derby.

In April 1946 the young women of the A.T.S.—who had been in possession of most of Normanton Barracks for a long time—left, leaving only the Depot Party (under Major H. F. Whittle) in occupation. In November 1946 the barracks became the home of No. 45 Primary Training Centre (P.T.C.) under Lieut-Colonel Hugo Meynell, a Forester. During this period the Depot Party of the Regiment remained in its war-time guise.

It was not until 1951 that it was decided to go back to the pre-war system of training recruits, and in November of that year the Foresters' Depot reverted to its old form and organization.

In 1948 the Colonel of the Regiment set up a post-war organization which was to deal with every aspect of Regimental affairs. This organization has persisted practically unaltered, and is as follows:


Colonel of Regiment
Colonel of Regiment's Committee
Regimental Headquarters Secretariat
Regimental Affairs Committee
Regimental Association Committee

This is an appropriate place to mention the very active Foresters Old Comrades' Association, which plays such an important part in the life of the Regiment.*

No account of the Old Comrades would be complete without mention of Lieut-Colonel A. A. Dean, who became Secretary in 1950. An ex-regular Officer of the Foresters he is primarily responsible for the success of the Association. In addition he is an acknowledged authority on the history, traditions and customs of the Regiment.

On 27th June 1949 the 5th Foresters provided the Guard of Honour on the occasion of the visit to Derby of Her Royal Highness The Princess Elizabeth and The Duke of Edinburgh. The fifty-strong Guard was commanded by Lieut-Colonel H. W. King.

At the Annual Camp at Tidworth in 1950 the 5th and 8th Battalions were visited by General Sir James Steele, the then Adjutant-General and an ex-Commanding Officer of the 1st Foresters, and by Mr. Emanuel Shinwell, the Minister of Defence, who addressed all the troops in camp.

The 1950 camps were mostly popular ones, which may account for the improved response among National Servicemen to become Territorial Volunteers—especially in the 8th Foresters. The summer of 1950 had also seen the very successful co-operation of the 8th Battalion with No. 12 Group, Fighter Command at Newton Aerodrome in 'The Battle of Britain Pageant'. This was probably another reason for the satisfactory number of volunteers.

A big event in 1951 occurred on the 25th April, when the Freedom of the town of Ilkeston was presented to the Regiment in front of an assembly of ten thousand people. In addition to a detachment representing the regular Foresters, there were parties from the four Territorial Battalions and the Cadets. Ilkeston is the 'home ground' of B Company of the 5th Foresters and the 5th provided the Colour Party and Band. The other Territorial Battalions each provided from 15 to 20 men on parade. The parade was commanded by Major S. Lowis, 5th Foresters.

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* For further details of The Sherwood Foresters' Association, see Chapter 16.

In this year a signal honour was conferred on the 7th Battalion. Army Order 73 of June 1951 stated that His Majesty The King had been graciously pleased for personnel of the 577th A-A./S.L. Regiment R.A. (Robin Hood Foresters), T.A.' —formerly the 42nd Searchlight Regiment, Royal Artillery (The Robin Hood Sherwood Foresters), Territorial Army—to wear a distinctive emblem, this unit having been cited by the Belgian Government for outstanding service in Belgium in the 1939–45 War (mainly in the air defence of Brussels). A piece of Belgian Croix-de-Guerre ribbon (1940) was to be placed horizontally near the top of each sleeve, but below the arm title when the latter is worn.

What was undoubtedly, up to then, the biggest Regimental event in the post-war years took place on the 6th July 1952. It is an old custom for the Foresters to hold a Regimental week at the beginning of July at Normanton Barracks. This includes cricket matches, a reunion dinner and ends on the Sunday with a Church Service in St. Giles Church, Normanton in the morning, followed by a Pilgrimage to the Crich War Memorial in the afternoon. The Colonel of the Regiment is invariably present and Serving members, Old Comrades and civilians attend the various functions in large numbers.

The 1952 Pilgrimage—held on Sunday, 6th July—was of special significance, as it marked the dedication of the 1939–45 War Memorial. This consists of two plaques one on either side of the gate in the wall immediately surrounding the tower—that on the left an inscription: that on the right the badges of the various Battalions of the Regiment.

The Bishop of Southwell performed the dedication and the Bishop of Derby gave the blessing. This was followed by an address by Major-General P. N. White, the Colonel of the Sherwood Foresters.

The Colours of the 1st, 2nd, 5th, 6th and 8th Foresters were on parade—a great occasion.

1952 was a good training year for the Territorial Army. During the Summer a large number of Class Z Reservists* were called up for training—mostly with Territorial Army units at their annual camps. At the same time the Robin Hoods carried out two deployment exercises, and the 8th Battalion took its proper shape in camp for the first time, as a fully equipped Motor Battalion.

The great event of 1953 was the Coronation of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II on the 2nd June. Both Regular Battalions sent representative detachments and the Depot and Territorial Battalions celebrated the occasion in a suitable manner locally.

The years 1953 and 1954 saw the death of two distinguished members of the Regiment. At Bakewell on the 15th April 1953 Colonel E. M. Brooke Taylor—a pre-war Commanding Officer of the 6th Battalion—collapsed at a reunion dinner whilst making a speech, in reply to one by the Duke of Devonshire proposing the health of the Regiment. On the 2nd October Colonel H. H. Lilly, who had commanded the 5th Foresters at Singapore in 1942, died. During the captivity he became well known as a stubborn upholder with the Japanese authorities of his men's rights, who did much to mitigate their lot while they were prisoners of war.

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* Class Z Reservists were men in certain age-groups who served in the 1939–45 war. This reserve was formed as a stop-gap, pending the formation of a reserve from post-war enlistments.

By the Spring of 1954 the Territorial Army had grown in strength, owing to the influx of National Servicemen who had completed their whole-time service. The Foresters were very successful in persuading a high proportion of such men to become Territorial volunteers. In the early summer of 1954 the 5th Battalion had reached a strength of about 800 (approximately one-third volunteers) and the 8th Battalion 926.

For some time it had become clear that Anti-Aircraft Command, in its post-war form, could not last very much longer—in face of the great heights and speed at which modern aircraft could fly, and new methods of defence against air attack. In 1955 it was decided to abolish Anti-Aircraft Command, to disband many of its units, and convert others to new rôles. Fortunately the two Forester Anti-Aircraft units—the 6th Battalion and The Robin Hoods—were selected for conversion and not disbandment. The 6th Battalion, without any change of title, was transferred from the 65th Anti-Aircraft Brigade to become the Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment of the 49th Armoured Division. The Robin Hoods reached a different, but nevertheless happy, solution. It amalgamated with the 350th (South Notts. Hussars) Heavy Regiment, R.A. (T.A.), with the title '350th (Robin Hood Foresters) Heavy Regiment R.A., T.A.'—under command of Lieut-Colonel D. M. Smith.

The last two years covered by this history was a quiet period for the Territorial Battalions. It is appropriate to conclude the narrative with a reference to two Royal occasions.

On the 6th July 1955 Her Majesty the Queen visited Nottingham, The Robin Hoods provided the Guard of Honour and the Band of the 8th Battalion was also on parade.

Her Majesty repeated her visit to the Regimental area on the 27th March 1957 when she went to Derby. The 5th Foresters provided the Guard of Honour on this occasion.

THE END OF AN ERA

The year 1957 may be described as the end of an era for the British Fighting Services—the Army in particular. For some time it had been apparent that the international situation, together with the development of nuclear weapons and other devices, made drastic changes inevitable and that they could not be long delayed.

In April and July Mr. Duncan Sandys, the Minister of Defence, announced plans for the future of the Services. As far as the Army was concerned the chief features were:

(a) The maintenance of a force—mainly in Germany—equipped and trained to fight a major war with tactical nuclear weapons in support of our N.A.T.O. Allies.

(b) The maintenance of conventional land forces of sufficient strength to provide overseas garrisons in the less developed part of the Commonwealth, and to engage in small scale operations. This commitment would fall mainly on the Infantry.

(c) To implement this policy, and also on grounds of economy, it was proposed to abolish the 'call up' in 1960 and revert to a long-service professional army—reduced in strength to about 160,000—by 1962, when the last National Serviceman would be due to leave.

(d) Among other economies the Infantry of the Line was to be reduced to 49 Regular Battalions. This involved a decrease of 15 Battalions, which was to be carried out by pairing 30 Regiments and amalgamating them.

That, in the simplest terms, was the plan for the British Army's 'new look'.

THE FUTURE

At the time of writing (September 1957), the changes outlined above have only just been announced. They will take some years to implement, and many of the details have yet to be decided.

Fortunately the Sherwood Foresters was not among the Regiments to be amalgamated. The reduction to be made in Army strength is very drastic, and it would appear unlikely that any further pruning will take place for many years to come. The Regiment can look forward, with reasonable certainty, to a long life in which to add lustre to its name. There will be changes, however; the main one being a closer association between the Foresters and their old friends in the Midland Brigade—the Royal Warwickshire Regiment and the Royal Leicestershire Regiment. The training of recruits will be carried out at the Midland Brigade combined Depot at Leicester; but a small Regimental Depot will be retained for recruiting purposes and to deal with Regimental affairs.

It is the purpose of a book of this kind to record the past—not to forecast the future. To attempt to describe in detail 'what may happen' would be out of place, and must be left to another historian.

It will be appropriate at this time of change to end this chapter by quoting an historic example of the spirit which animates the Foresters.

On the 27th November 1956 Her Majesty The Queen honoured the Army

Council and the Army with Her presence at dinner at the Royal Hospital, Chelsea. During the course of her speech the Queen said:

> 'A short time ago I was shown a letter written by a private soldier who had just been transferred from his old Regiment to a new one. He wrote to his former Colonel somewhat as follows:
>
> *'You will see by the address that disaster has overtaken me. I feel something like a man who has awakened from an operation to find himself minus a limb. They have taken away my cap badge and with it the great love of my life. The traditions of my county regiment are in my blood and to be known as a Forester was an estate of which I was deeply proud.'*
>
> 'This,' said Her Majesty, 'is how one British soldier feels about his Regiment.'

The private soldier—restored to the Foresters soon after writing this letter—was William Wykes, a Colour Sergeant at the time of Her Majesty's speech. The Commanding Officer to whom the letter was written was Major (later Colonel) S. L. A. Carter.

STATEMENT OF THE SUCCESSES OF THE REGULAR BATTALIONS AND REGIMENTAL DEPOT, THE SHERWOOD FORESTERS AT SHOOTING AND SPORT DURING THE POST-WAR II PERIOD—1946 to 1957

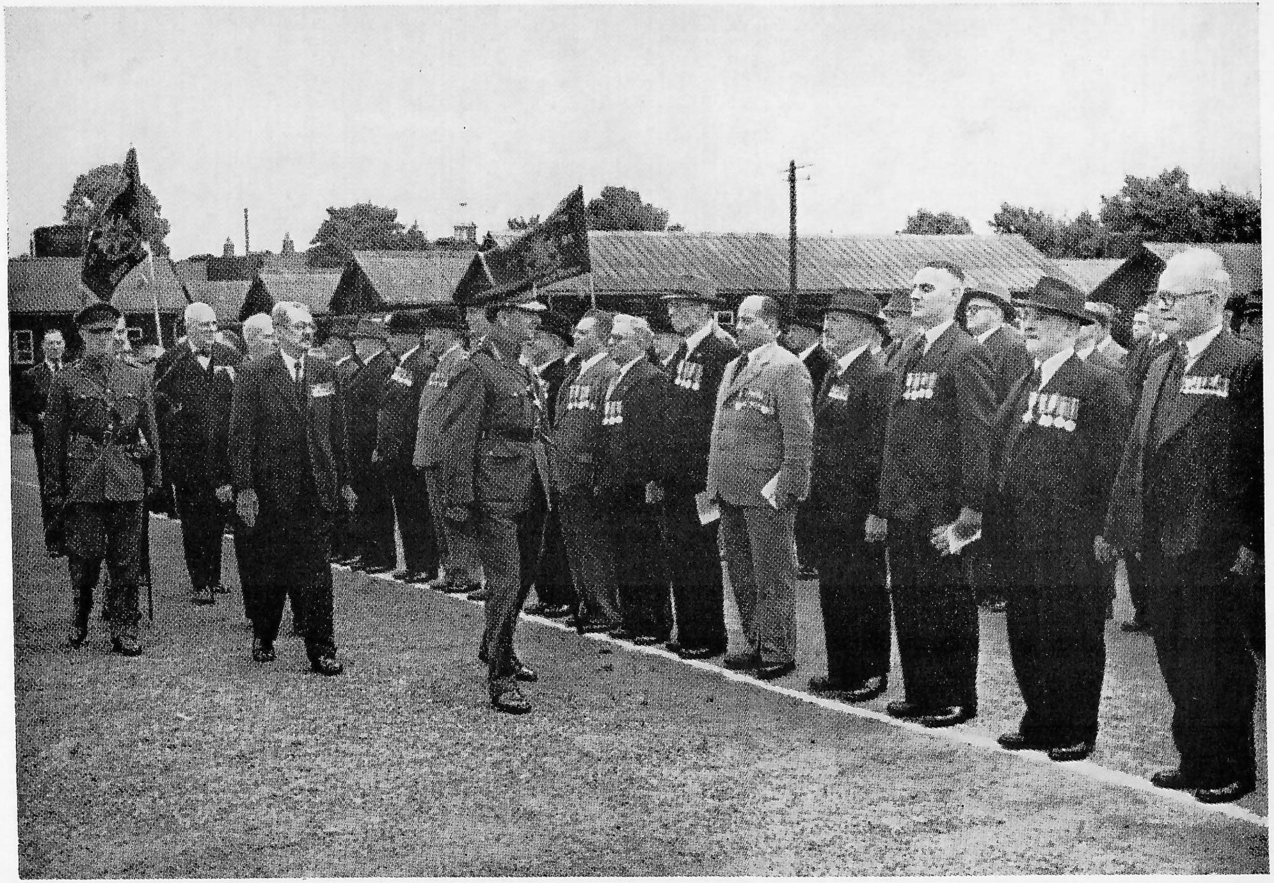
Note: Unless otherwise stated the competitions mentioned were won by the unit of the Regiment concerned.

1947	Hamburg Sub-Area Boxing Shield	1st Bn.
1947	Hamburg Sub-Area Cricket League Champions	1st Bn.
1947	Hamburg Sub-Area Football League Div. 1	1st Bn.
1948	Hamburg Dist. K.O. Football Cup	1st Bn.
1948	Hamburg Sub-Area Football League	1st Bn.
1948	Shooting I.C.I. Challenge Cup	1st Bn.
1949	Hanover Dist. Water Polo Shield	1st Bn.
1951	Derby and Dist. Wednesday Football League II	Depot
1952	3rd Div. Athletic Championship	1st Bn.
1952	Eastern Comd. Cycle Race 25 Mile (Pte. Sutherland-White)	2nd Bn.
1953	2nd Div. Inter-Company Football Cup (HQ Company)	2nd Bn.
1953	Northern Comd. Maxse—Inter-Depot Shooting	Depot
1953	Derby and Dist. Wednesday Football League Medals	Depot
1953	Northern Comd. Minor Units Hockey Championship	Depot
1954	Cyrenaica Dist. Hockey Cup	1st Bn.
1954	7th Armd. Bde. Athletic Championship	2nd Bn.
1954	North Midland Dist. Inter-Depot Shooting Champions	Depot
1954	Army Singles Tennis Championship (Pte. J. A. Pickard)	Depot
1954	Northern Comd. Singles Tennis Championship (Pte. J. A. Pickard)	Depot
1955	Cyrenaica Dist. Hockey Cup	1st Bn.
1955	Derby and Dist. Wednesday Football League Cup	Depot
1955	North Midland Dist. Major Units Hockey Championship	Depot
1955	North Midland Dist. Swimming Championship	Depot

The Regimental Depot, Normanton Barracks, Derby—1958

View from the Orderly Room

The Barrack Square



The Colchester Reunion, 1952
The Colonel of the Regiment (Major-General P. N. White, C.B., C.B.E.) inspecting the Old Comrades

1955	Army Singles Championship (L/Cpl. J. A. Pickard)	Depot
1955	Northern Comd. Singles Championship (L/Cpl. J. A. Pickard) .	Depot
1956	4th Inf. Div. 88-stone Tug-of-War	1st Bn.
1956	11th Inf. Bde. Athletic Championship	1st Bn.
1957	North Midland Dist. Minor Units Football	Depot
1957	Northern Comd. Minor Units Football	Depot
1957	Rhine Army Rifle Meeting—Champion Officer shot (Captain J. M. K. Nevitt)	1st Bn.
1957	Rhine Army Rifle Meeting. Young Soldiers Match	1st Bn.
1957	Rhine Army Rifle Meeting. Individual LMG Pair. (L/Cpl. Moore and L/Cpl. Lyne)	1st Bn.
1957	North Midland Dist. Open Cricket Championship	Depot

CHAPTER 16

EPILOGUE

When writing a chronological history it is usual to find that certain important events and statistics do not fit into the narrative, and must be recorded separately. It is the purpose of this chapter to fill these gaps.

COLONELS OF THE REGIMENT

During the 38 years of history recorded in this book the Sherwood Foresters have been fortunate in having six distinguished officers at the head of affairs as Colonels of their Regiment.

General Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien (1905–1930) was a legendary figure—'the greatest Forester of all'—who led the II Corps at Le Cateau in the old B.E.F. of 1914. He had the almost unique experience of being the Colonel of a Regiment for a quarter of a century. His name is perpetuated by the Smith-Dorrien Memorial in front of the Regimental Memorial Tower on Crich Hill.

Lieut-General Sir William Marshall (1930–1935) led the victorious British and Indian troops who rounded up practically the whole Turkish Army in Mesopotamia (now Iraq) in the autumn of 1918.

Major-General Sir Frederick Maurice (1935–1941) had his military career cut short in World War I owing to political repercussions which followed some disclosures which he made when Director of Military Operations at the War Office. Later he took up military writing and became the foremost military historian and lecturer of the post-World War I years.

Lieut-General Sir Douglas Brownrigg (1941–1946) and Lieut-General Sir Henry Willcox (1946–1947) both had distinguished careers, the former being Adjutant-General to the B.E.F. of 1939–40.

It is invidious, and may be embarrassing, to praise the holder of an appointment while he is still in office, and it is not an Army custom to do so. Major-General P. N. White has been Colonel of the Foresters since 1947. They have been difficult years. He has seen one of his Regular Battalions placed in 'suspended animation', then reformed and then lose its separate identity for a second time. It has been a period of disbandment in the Territorial Army; but the four Forester Battalions have survived, although their titles and rôles have changed. Just before the script of this history was completed the announcement was made that thirty Infantry

Regiments were to be amalgamated. Fortunately the Foresters were not among them; but the period before the announcement—when changes were known to be impending, but details were lacking—was one of anxiety, particularly for Colonels of Regiments. One has only to scan the pages of the Regimental Magazine, *The Forester*, to realize how thoroughly the present Colonel of the Regiment performs his duties, and the intense interest he shows in everything connected with the Foresters.

ALLIED AND AFFILIATED UNITS

There are two classes of unit allied and affiliated to the Sherwood Foresters, namely:

Regiments of the Canadian Army

The Manitoba Rangers.
The Grey and Simcoe Foresters.

Army Cadets

These have undergone some changes in recent years, but at the time of writing the organization is as follows:

Nottinghamshire Brigade	1st (Notts.) Cadet Bn. The Sherwood Foresters (Nottingham)
	2nd (Notts.) Cadet Bn. The Sherwood Foresters (Retford)
	3rd (Notts.) Cadet Bn. The Sherwood Foresters (Mansfield)
	Newark Independent Cadet Company, The Sherwood Foresters (Newark)
Derbyshire Brigade	5th Sherwood Foresters Cadet Battalion (Derby)
	6th (Foresters) Cadet Regiment, R.A. (Chesterfield)

Although distance, and the Atlantic crossing, prevents frequent physical contact with the Allied Canadian Regiments, there is, nevertheless, a close liaison, by means of correspondence and notes which appear from time to time in *The Forester*.

The Cadets, however, are located in the Regimental area and close contact is practicable. Parties frequently participate in Regimental parades and gatherings, and many men in the ranks of the Foresters are ex-members of one or other of the affiliated Cadet units.

THE SHERWOOD FORESTERS' ASSOCIATION

Mention has already been made of the Old Comrades' Association which at the time of writing consists of some 2000 ex-members of the Regiment who served as Foresters in war and peace.

The Colonel of the Regiment is President of the Association, which has a standing Committee of all ranks. The executive business is carried out by the Secretary, Lieut-Colonel A. A. Dean, with Headquarters at Normanton Barracks, Derby.

There is an annual dinner every autumn—in Derby and Nottingham alternately—and every year on the first Sunday in July members hold a Church Parade at the Regimental Church of St. Giles, Normanton, followed by a Pilgrimage to the War Memorial at Crich in the afternoon.

The main purpose of the Association is to foster intercourse among old members of the Regiment; but there is also a fund for the assistance of members who may be in need of help.

THE REGIMENTAL MUSEUM

In recent years the Museum has been overhauled and completely reorganized. It is now housed in a spacious building at Normanton Barracks under the care of its capable Curator—Mr. A. B. Helliwell, an ex-Officer of the 14th Foresters Home Guard Battalion.

The many interesting and valuable exhibits connected with the Regiment are carefully labelled and described, and kept in specially made cases of suitable design and size.

The Museum is open to the public at specified times on certain days of the week.

THE REGIMENTAL MAGAZINE—*THE FORESTER*

Before World War II the Sherwood Foresters' Magazine took the form of an Annual. This served the purpose well in those days; but, with the increasing tempo of events, it was thought best to increase the frequency of publication in the post-war years. *The Forester* is now published twice a year, in March and September.

HONOURS AND AWARDS

For Valour

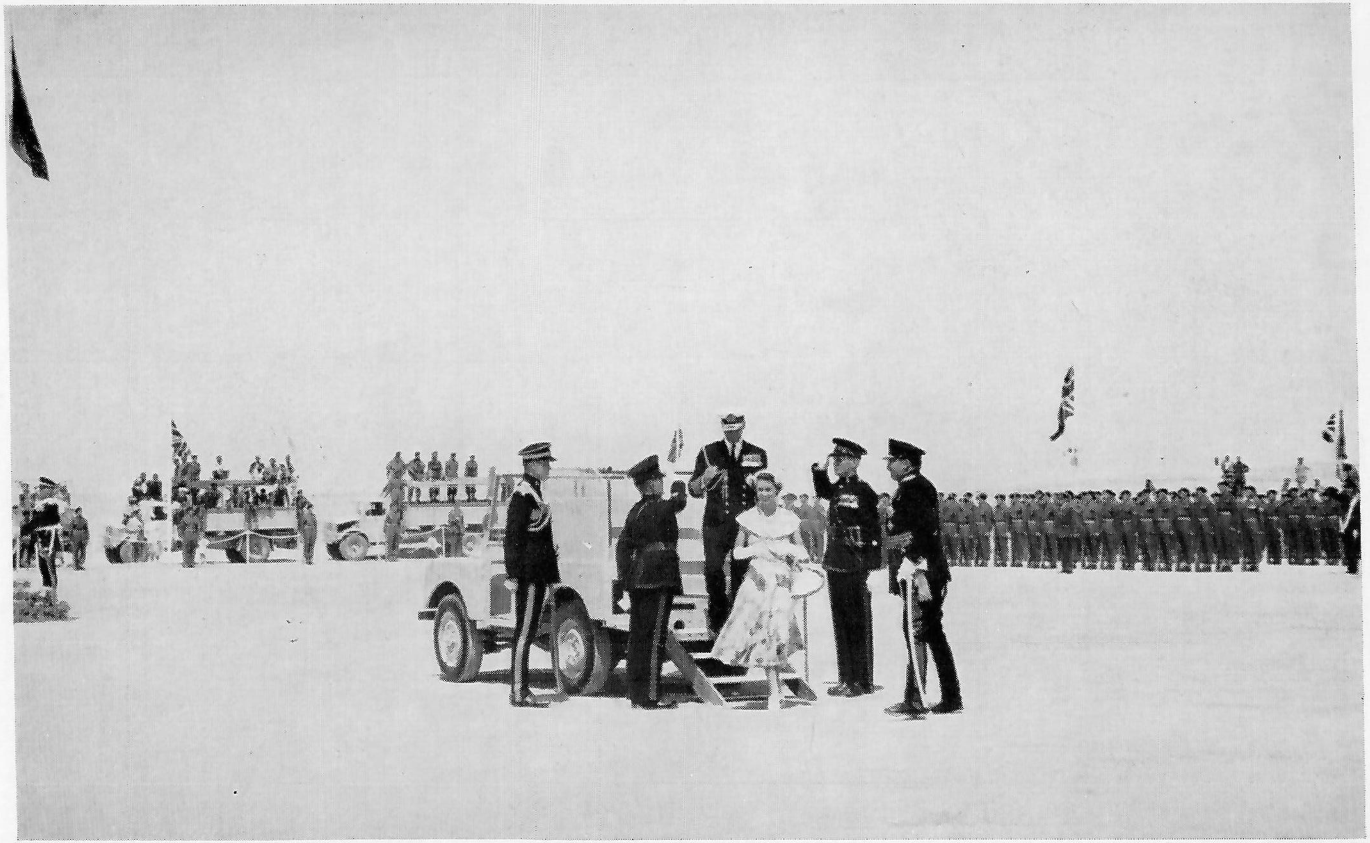
One Victoria Cross was awarded in World War II to a member of the Regiment—Captain J. H. C. Brunt, V.C., whilst serving with the 6th Bn. The Royal Lincolnshire Regiment in Italy in December 1944.

The citation for this award was as follows:

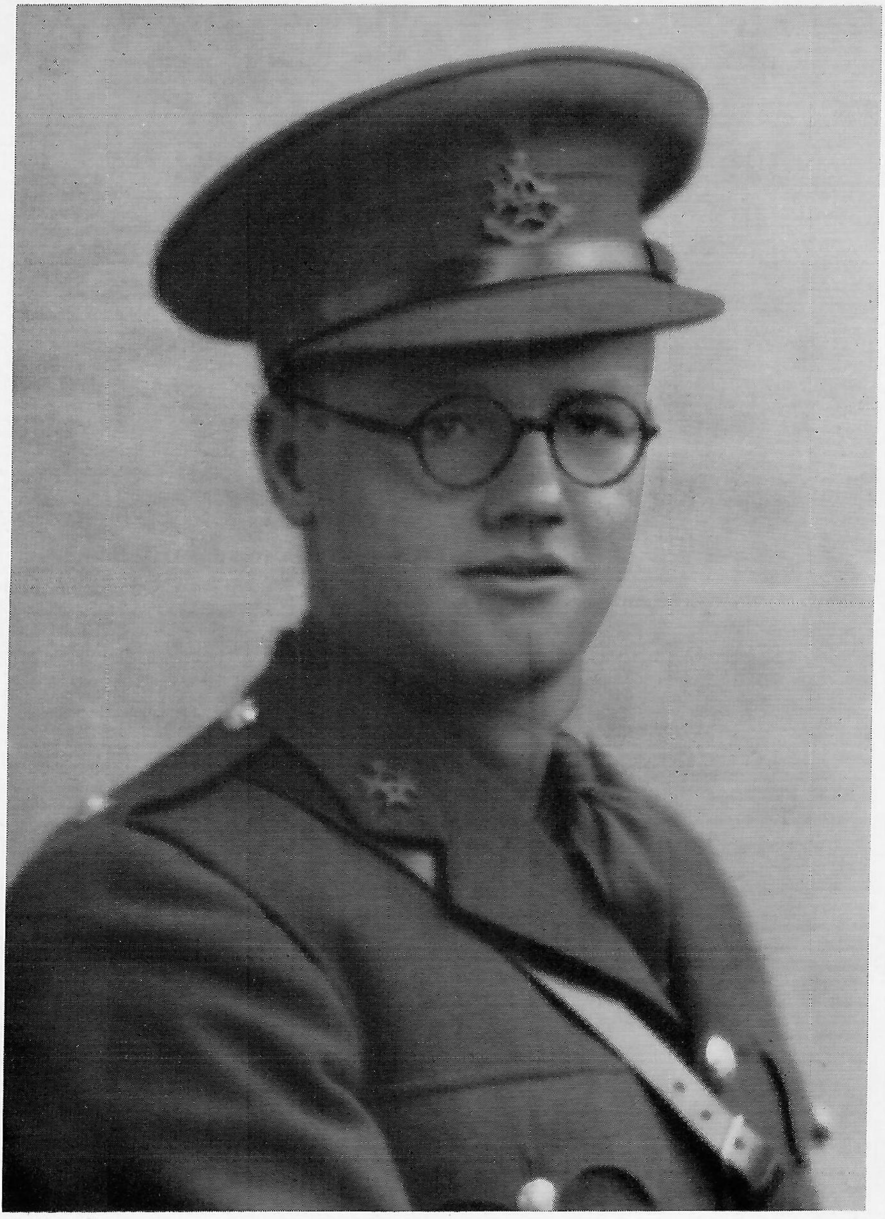
BRUNT, CAPTAIN J. H. C.

(Whilst serving with the 6th Lincolns in Italy)

While Captain Brunt's platoon were holding a vital sector of the line on 9th December 1944, a German Division attacked the Battalion's forward position



Tobruk, 1954
Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II visits the 1st Battalion



The Fourteenth Forester V.C.
The late Captain J. H. C. Brunt, V.C.

in great strength; the house around which Captain Blunt's platoon were dug in was subject to intensive mortar fire, causing many casualties. Captain Brunt rallied remaining men, and himself operating a Bren gun, held back an enemy that outnumbered his own force by at least three to one. When this platoon was ordered to withdraw, he stayed behind to give covering fire; when the Bren ammunition was exhausted he fired a Piat and a 2-in. mortar, before himself dashing back to rejoin his men. As the enemy attack had paused owing to his efforts, he was able to return with a party and evacuate the wounded.

Later in the day, he stood on the turret of a tank, and directed Besa fire at the advancing enemy; then he leapt down from the tank, seized a Bren gun, and stalked small parties of the enemy well in front of the Company positions, finally forcing them to retire. The next day this most gallant officer was killed by mortar fire.

8th February 1945.

Unit Award

For services in North-West Europe the Robin Hoods were awarded the Belgian *Croix de Guerre*—an honour rarely bestowed on any unit in World War II.

Other Awards

The names of other Foresters who received awards for gallantry and good service are too numerous to mention; but the following list gives the number of awards made to Officers and Other Ranks:

Companion of the Order of the Bath (C.B.)	1
Commander of the Order of the British Empire (C.B.E.)	3
Distinguished Service Order (D.S.O).	11
Officer of the Order of the British Empire (O.B.E.)	18
Bar to Military Cross (M.C.)	5
Military Cross (M.C.)	28
Distinguished Conduct Medal (D.C.M.)	8
Military Medal (M.M.)	53
Member of the Order of the British Empire (M.B.E.)	21
British Empire Medal (B.E.M.)	6
Mentioned in Despatches	235
American Silver Star	1

Most of these awards were given for services in North Africa and Italy—others for the Middle East, Norway, North-West Europe (1939–40 and 1944–45), Sicily and Burma, for Special Operations and to Escaped Prisoners of War.

OTHER STATISTICS

(a) *Enlistments*

The following numbers served with the Sherwood Foresters during World War II (the figures include only those who served in Battalions of the Regiment in an Infantry rôle).

By direct enlistment	9,700
By transfer from units of other Regiments . . .	17,240
Total .	26,940

(b) *Casualties*

1520 Officers, Warrant Officers, N.C.O.s and men of the Regiment were killed, or died of wounds, during World War II.

(Note: In World War I the number of men who served with the Regiment was approximately 150,000 and the number killed, or died of wounds, was 11,407.)

CONCLUSION

The Sherwood Foresters had an unusual war and, in some respects, an unfortunate one. Among the very first units to engage the enemy in World War II, the 8th Battalion suffered almost complete extinction in Norway in the Spring of 1940. Some two years later the 5th Battalion at Singapore, and the 1st Battalion at Tobruk, were each involved in a large-scale general surrender of British troops. No unit of the Regiment operated in an Infantry rôle during the liberation of North-West Europe and the invasion of Germany in 1944–45, although the 7th Battalion did fine work in the guise of an Anti-Aircraft Regiment. The Foresters were not represented in the Burma campaigns.

As explained earlier in the book the Regiment's main war effort was in the Mediterranean and Middle East. It was in this theatre that its Battalions performed service, and gained distinction, second to none—the 1st and 14th in the Eighth Army, the 2nd and 2/5th (5th) in Tunisia and the 2nd, 2/5th (5th) and 14th in Italy. Their deeds in these campaigns, and others, are commemorated in the following Battle Honours awarded to the Regiment for World War II:

'Norway, 1940', 'St. Omer–La Bassee', 'Ypres–Comines Canal', 'Dunkirk, 1940', 'North-West Europe, 1940', *'Gazala'*, *'El Alamein'*, 'Djebel Guerba', 'Tamera', 'Medjaz Plain', *'Tunis'*, 'North Africa, 1942–43', *'Salerno'*, 'Volturno Crossing', 'Monte Camino', *'Anzio'*, *'Campoleone'*, 'Advance to Tiber', *'Gothic Line'*, *'Coriano'*, 'Cosina Canal Crossing', 'Monte Ceco', 'Italy, 1943–45', *'Singapore Island'*, 'Malaya, 1942'.

(Those in italics are the ten selected to be borne on the Colours.)

Finally, let us remember those Foresters who marched to war in 1939–1945 and did not come back.

GOD SAVE THE QUEEN

APPENDIX A

ROLL OF COMMANDING OFFICERS—1919–1957

(This Appendix has been compiled from Official sources. The dates given are those of actual command and, in the case of war-time appointments, may not always be the same as in the *London Gazette*—due to the fact that Officers frequently served in command for some time before their appointments were officially confirmed.)

*Indicates still serving in appointment in July 1957.

COLONELS OF THE REGIMENT

	From	*To*
General Sir Horace L. Smith-Dorrien, G.C.B., G.C.M.G., D.S.O.	June 1905	Aug. 1930
Lieut-General Sir William R. Marshall, G.C.M.G., K.C.B., K.C.S.I.	Aug. 1930	Oct. 1935
Major-General Sir Frederick B. Maurice, K.C.M.G., C.B.	Oct. 1935	Jan. 1941
Lieut-General Sir W. Douglas S. Brownrigg, K.C.B., D.S.O.	Jan. 1941	Feb. 1946
Lieut-General Sir Henry B. D. Willcox, K.C.I.E., C.B., D.S.O., M.C.	Feb. 1946	Nov. 1947
Major-General P. N. White, C.B., C.B.E.	Nov. 1947	*

COMMANDING OFFICERS

1st Battalion	*From*	*To*
Bt. Colonel J. C. Harding-Newman	Jan. 1919	Feb. 1921
Lieut-Colonel B. G. V. May	Feb. 1921	Aug. 1922
Lieut-Colonel W. N. S. Alexander	Aug. 1922	May 1923
Lieut-Colonel J. H. Wybergh	May 1923	Jan. 1924
Lieut-Colonel K. C. Weldon	Jan. 1924	Jan. 1928
Lieut-Colonel R. T. Foster	Jan. 1928	Jan. 1932
Lieut-Colonel A. A. Fenn	Jan. 1932	Jan. 1936
Lieut-Colonel A. T. Miller	Jan. 1936	Oct. 1937
Lieut-Colonel J. S. Steele	Oct. 1937	June 1939
Lieut-Colonel W. A. Ebsworth	June 1939	Aug. 1940
Lieut-Colonel W. A. Platt	Aug. 1940	Apr. 1942
Lieut-Colonel A. S. Edwards	Apr. 1942	Early June 1942
Major H. D. Pyman†	Early June 1942	21 June 1942

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† As explained in Chapter 6 the 1st Battalion was overrun and captured at Tobruk in June 1942, and was resuscitated (from the 16th Battalion) in January 1943.

COMMANDING OFFICERS—*continued*

	From	*To*
Lieut-Colonel E. E. Sullivan-Tailyour	Jan. 1943	June 1944
Lieut-Colonel F. E. A. MacDonnell	June 1944	June 1945
Lieut-Colonel G. R. G. Bird	June 1945	Feb. 1948
Lieut-Colonel R. M. Ingall	Feb. 1948	Jan. 1949
Lieut-Colonel H. F. Meynell	Jan. 1949	Sept. 1951
Lieut-Colonel R. H. S. Popham	Sept. 1951	June 1954
Lieut-Colonel H. D. Pyman	June 1954	June 1957
Lieut-Colonel M. J. D'A. Blackman	June 1957	*

2nd Battalion	*From*	*To*
Lieut-Colonel J. F. T. Taylor	Feb. 1919	Feb. 1922
Lieut-Colonel R. S. Popham	Feb. 1922	Feb. 1926
Lieut-Colonel R. S. Hart	Feb. 1926	Feb. 1930
Lieut-Colonel C. H. Dumbell	Feb. 1930	Apr. 1933
Lieut-Colonel J. S. Wilkinson	Apr. 1933	Nov. 1934
Lieut-Colonel R. L. Sherbrooke	Nov. 1934	Nov. 1938
Lieut-Colonel G. M. Gamble	Nov. 1938	May 1940
Lieut-Colonel J. E. Wright	May 1940	Aug. 1940
Lieut-Colonel C. R. T. Wilmot	Aug. 1940	June 1942
Lieut-Colonel R. T. K. Pye	June 1942	Aug. 1943
Lieut-Colonel G. R. G. Bird	Aug. 1943	Jan. 1944
Lieut-Colonel J. H. M. Hackett	Jan. 1944	Nov. 1944
Lieut-Colonel J. K. Windeatt	Nov. 1944	July 1946
Lieut-Colonel R. M. Ingall	July 1946	Dec. 1947
Lieut-Colonel R. D. Blackie	Dec. 1947	Sept. 1948

(The Battalion was placed in suspended animation in September 1948, but was reformed in April 1952.)

Lieut-Colonel R. C. Foster	Apr. 1952	Aug. 1954
Lieut-Colonel J. H. M. Hackett	Aug. 1954	July 1955

(The Battalion was amalgamated with the 1st Battalion in July 1955.)

3rd (Militia) Battalion	*From*	*To*
Lieut-Colonel H. E. D. Wise	Nov. 1916	Sept. 1926

(The 3rd Battalion was disembodied in 1919 and remained inactive until 1953, when it was disbanded. No Commanding Officer was appointed after Lieut-Colonel Wise vacated command in September 1926.)

4th (Militia) Battalion	*From*	*To*
Lieut-Colonel G. H. W. Bernal	Sept. 1917	Dec. 1921

(The 4th Battalion was disembodied in 1919 and remained inactive until 1953, when it was disbanded. No Commanding Officer was appointed after Lieut-Colonel Bernal vacated command in December 1921.)

Appendix A: Roll of Commanding Officers—1919–1957

5th (1/5th) Battalion	*From*	*To*
Lieut-Colonel T. C. Newbold	Feb. 1920	Feb. 1924
Lieut-Colonel B. H. Beaumont-Checkland	Feb. 1924	Feb. 1928
Lieut-Colonel (Bt. Colonel Feb. 1932) J. D. Kerr	Feb. 1928	Feb. 1934
Lieut-Colonel H. H. Lilly	Feb. 1934	May 1935
Lieut-Colonel W. T. Greenfield	May 1935	May 1939
Lieut-Colonel H. H. Lilly	May 1939	Feb. 1942

(The Battalion was captured at Singapore in February 1942, but was resuscitated from the 2/5th Battalion—which was redesignated '5th Battalion'—in January 1943.)

Lieut-Colonel R. E. H. Stott	June 1941 (2/5th Bn.)	Mar. 1943
Lieut-Colonel E. A. Hefford	Mar. 1943	Oct. 1943
Lieut-Colonel R. J. Welchman	Oct. 1943	Mar. 1946

(Battalion reduced to cadre strength in March 1946, but reformed in May 1947.)

Lieut-Colonel H. W. King	May 1947	June 1950
Lieut-Colonel R. C. Foster	June 1950	Jan. 1952
Lieut-Colonel D. H. Kelly	Jan. 1952	Feb. 1955
Lieut-Colonel G. S. Aspdin	Feb. 1955	*

2/5th Battalion	*From*	*To*
Lieut-Colonel H. B. Everard	May 1939	May 1940
Lieut-Colonel J. H. Hassell	June 1940	June 1941
Lieut-Colonel R. E. H. Stott	June 1941	Mar. 1943

(The Battalion became the 5th Battalion in January 1943.)

6th Battalion† *(40th (The Sherwood Foresters) Anti-Aircraft Bn. R.E.)*
(40th S.L. Regt. R.A.)
(149th Light A.A. Regt. R.A.)
(575th Light A.A. Regt. (The Foresters) R.A. (T.A.))

	From	*To*
Lieut-Colonel E. Hall	Feb. 1920	Feb. 1925
Lieut-Colonel (Bt. Colonel Feb. 1929) F. M. Dick	Feb. 1925	Feb. 1931
Lieut-Colonel E. M. B. Taylor	Feb. 1931	Feb. 1935
Lieut-Colonel V. O. Robinson	Feb. 1935	Feb. 1939
Lieut-Colonel H. H. Jackson	Feb. 1939	June 1941
Lieut-Colonel E. N. Elford	June 1941	Jan. 1943
Lieut-Colonel J. P. Widgery	Jan. 1943	Oct. 1945
Lieut-Colonel J. E. Parks	Oct. 1945	Feb. 1946

(Battalion reduced to cadre strength in February 1946, but reformed in May 1947.)

Lieut-Colonel N. E. Carline	May 1947	May 1950
Lieut-Colonel A. W. Compton Glossop	May 1950	May 1953
Lieut-Colonel C. P. Robinson	May 1953	May 1956
Lieut-Colonel J. E. Edmunds	May 1956	*

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† Names in brackets show the various designations of the 6th Battalion after it became an Anti-Aircraft unit.

7th Battalion† *(42nd (The Robin Hood, Sherwood Foresters) Anti-Aircraft Bn. R.E.)*
(42nd S.L. Regt. R.A.)
(577th Searchlight Regt. R.A. (Robin Hood Foresters) (T.A.))
(577th Light A-A/S.L. Regt. R.A. (Robin Hood Foresters) (T.A.))
(350th (Robin Hood, Foresters) Light Regt. R.A. (T.A.))

	From	*To*
Lieut-Colonel A. W. Brewill	Feb. 1920	Feb. 1922
Lieut-Colonel (Bt. Colonel Feb. 1926) W. R. Rook	Feb. 1922	Jan. 1929
Lieut-Colonel (Bt. Colonel Jan. 1933) L. C. Brewill	Jan. 1929	Jan. 1935
Lieut-Colonel A. A. Walton	Jan. 1935	Jan. 1939
Lieut-Colonel B. H. Brewill	Jan. 1939	June 1940
Lieut-Colonel E. L. Coley	June 1940	Sept. 1942
Lieut-Colonel C. W. Cronin	Sept. 1942	June 1945
Lieut-Colonel F. Piper	June 1945	Oct. 1945
Lieut-Colonel G. A. Wharton	Oct. 1945	Mar. 1946

(Battalion reduced to cadre strength in March 1946, but reformed in May 1947.)

Lieut-Colonel G. A. Wharton	May 1947	Apr. 1951
Lieut-Colonel J. N. Vallance	Apr. 1951	July 1955
Lieut-Colonel W. M. Smith	July 1955	*

8th Battalion

	From	*To*
Lieut-Colonel B. A. Smith	Feb. 1920	Feb. 1924
Lieut-Colonel (Bt. Colonel Feb. 1928) A. C. Clarke	Feb. 1924	Feb. 1932
Lieut-Colonel W. C. C. Weetman	Feb. 1932	Feb. 1936
Lieut-Colonel H. A. F. Crewdson	Feb. 1936	Aug. 1939
Lieut-Colonel T. A. Ford	Aug. 1939	May 1940
Lieut-Colonel E. E. Sullivan-Tailyour	May 1940	Dec. 1942
Lieut-Colonel H. Drury	Dec. 1942	Dec. 1943
Lieut-Colonel J. D. Gage-Brown	Dec. 1943	June 1944
Lieut-Colonel G. R. G. Bird	June 1944	June 1945
Lieut-Colonel H. P. L. Glass	June 1945	Sept. 1946

(Battalion reduced to cadre strength in September 1946, but reformed in March 1947.)

Lieut-Colonel H. P. L. Glass	Mar. 1947	Oct. 1950
Lieut-Colonel T. B. Elliott	Oct. 1950	May 1953
Lieut-Colonel G. P. Gofton Salmond	May 1953	July 1956
Lieut-Colonel J. N. Nicholson	July 1956	*

9th Battalion (112th Regiment Royal Armoured Corps)

	From	*To*
Lieut-Colonel C. G. Lancaster	May 1939	Sept. 1942
Lieut-Colonel A. G. Miller	Sept. 1942	Oct. 1944

(Disbanded October 1944.)

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† Names in brackets show the various designations of the 7th Battalion after it became an Anti-Aircraft Regiment.

10th (30th) Battalion

	From	To
Lieut-Colonel N. Lloyd-Dexter	Nov. 1939	July 1942
Lieut-Colonel H. F. Meynell	July 1942	Dec. 1942

(The 10th Battalion became the 30th Battalion in June 1942. The latter was disbanded in December 1942.)

12th Battalion

	From	To
Lieut-Colonel N. A. McD. Walker	July 1940	Apr. 1942
Lieut-Colonel R. M. Ingall	Apr. 1942	Aug. 1944
Lieut-Colonel R. P. Scott	Aug. 1944	Feb. 1946

(Disbanded in India in February 1946.)

13th Battalion (163rd Regiment Royal Armoured Corps)

	From	To
Lieut-Colonel F. C. Yeo	July 1940	Oct. 1941
Lieut-Colonel A. L. Gill	Oct. 1941	May 1945
Lieut-Colonel L. C. Cooper	May 1945	Sept. 1945

(Disbanded in India, September 1945.)

50th (14th) Battalion

	From	To
Lieut-Colonel A. Andrews	May 1940	Dec. 1942
Lieut-Colonel G. B. Fairbanks	Dec. 1942	July 1943
Lieut-Colonel M. Redmayne	July 1943	July 1944
Lieut-Colonel G. P. Gofton-Salmond	July 1944	Dec. 1944

(Disbanded in December 1944.)

15th Battalion

	From	To
Lieut-Colonel T. Shand	Oct. 1940	Aug. 1941

(Disbanded in August 1941.)

70th (16th) (1st) Battalion

	From	To
Lieut-Colonel D. E. Prideaux-Brune	Oct. 1940	May 1941
Lieut-Colonel J. E. Wright	May 1941	Oct. 1942
Lieut-Colonel H. Drury	Oct. 1942	Dec. 1942

(In August 1942 the 70th Battalion was redesignated 16th, which in turn became the 1st Battalion on the 1st January 1943.)

The Regimental Depot and Infantry Training Centre Depot

	From	To
Major C. R. Mortimer	Dec. 1917	Jan. 1920
Major C. D. Harvey	Jan. 1920	Jan. 1923
Bt. Lieut-Colonel C. H. Dumbell	Jan. 1923	Aug. 1926
Major A. A. Fenn	Aug. 1926	Aug. 1929
Major R. L. Sherbrooke	Aug. 1929	Oct. 1933
Major R. R. Shawcross	Oct. 1933	Apr. 1936
Major E. E. Sullivan-Tailyour	Apr. 1936	Sept. 1939

(On mobilization in September 1939 the Regimental Depot expanded and became The Sherwood Foresters Infantry Training Centre (I.T.C.).)

The Regimental Depot and Infantry Training Centre Depot (*Contd.*)

I.T.C.	*From*	*To*
Lieut-Colonel A. A. Fenn	Sept. 1939	Aug. 1941

(In August 1941 the I.T.C. moved to Lincoln where it became part of No. 7 Infantry Training Centre, which was responsible for training men of the Foresters, Lincolns and York and Lancaster Regiment. A small Depot Party was left at Derby.)

Depot	*From*	*To*
Major J. D'A. Whicher	Aug. 1941	Oct. 1942
Major W. H. Barber	Oct. 1942	Sept. 1945
Major H. F. Whittle	Sept. 1945	Oct. 1946
Lieut-Colonel H. F. Meynell	Oct. 1946	Apr. 1948
Major S. L. A. Carter	Apr. 1948	Apr. 1949
Major M. J. D'A. Blackman	Apr. 1949	Sept. 1950
Major W. W. G. Redman	Sept. 1950	Mar. 1952

(In October 1951 the Regimental Depot reverted to its pre-war form and status.)

Major H. F. Coleman	Mar. 1952	Jan. 1955
Major H. T. Astell	Jan. 1955	Jan. 1957
Major V. C. W. Sudbury	Jan. 1957	*

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Note: This index contains the names of individuals (in the highest rank in which they are mentioned), place names, names of ships, formations and units.

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